

You ain't nobody until you got somebody by lovelysarcastic

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, F/M, Fluff and Angst, Slow Burn

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Original Characters, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2017-12-21

Updated: 2018-04-14

Packaged: 2022-04-21 15:40:35

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 11

Words: 31,503

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

What if soulmates aren't good for us? What if that so-called soulmate, the one that supposedly is so good for you, instead of loving you right, destroys you?

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

Hello, dear readers.

Yes, I'm back, but I cannot possibly promise you often updates since college is slowly killing me. But since I already have a few chapters written, I've decided to post the first chapter and see what you guys think.

To the people who have read my fics before, you know what you're getting into.

To those who are finding my stories for the first time, have fun.

If there are any grammar mistakes, I apologize. I'm not an English native-speaker, so my grammar might have flaws sometimes.

Why is everything in life about romantic love? Why is it that every movie talks about finding the right person, finding love and finally knowing what a happy life is? What is this weird thing that people believe in called soulmates? And why are they good for us? Why is that one person the best one for us, the one that makes us want to be better?

Even if there is only one person for us, one that is better than everyone else, why is it that her or his presence in our lives makes it better? Who decided that was how soulmates worked?

Maybe we should be asking different questions. See the other side of the coin. What if soulmates aren't good for us? What if that so-called soulmate, the one that supposedly is so good for you, instead of loving you right, destroys you?

party number one: the yellow dress

Mike Wheeler had just made out with some girl. He was sure he hadn't even got her name before her lips crashed against his, her tongue clearly having a life of its own. Now, he barely remembered her face. Was she blonde? Or was her hair just blonde-dyed?

It had been Lucas' idea to go out. It was Saturday night, they barely had any homework and, *for God's sakes, Mike, we're fifteen, we have to start going out!* Against such logical arguments, how could have Mike said no?

But he didn't want to go out. He hadn't wanted to. People lost their minds at parties. Teenagers that he knew from his class were currently so drunk that they were hitting walls, making out with strangers (he was guilty of that too), and talking so loud that their throats would be cursing them the next morning. They were dancing everywhere in the house (and who was the poor bastard that had sacrificed his home for such a terrible satanic ritual incorporated as a party?), breaking things, leaving signatures on the white walls of the hall, and stealing everything that could be eatable from the fridge.

Mike walked down the first floor's hallway, trying to avoid drunk people's bodies bumping against him. He climbed down the stairs, his eyes finding his tall best friend making out with two girls at the same time.

How did he do it? And why?

Was Mike a weirdo for not wanting to party, drink his ass off and kiss random girls?

Was Mike an idiot for believing he had better things to do than being in a party getting almost dry-humped by classmates who in the morning would be regretting everything?

Mike managed to walk out of the house without being stopped too many times by drunk people who had not sense of righteous or politeness.

He walked down the front yard, his eyes silently judging the teenagers that were laying down on the cold grass making out or sleeping. He was sure he saw a guy who was clearly in need of medical assistance, but no one was going to call the cops or the ambulance. After all, they were all underage.

Mike stopped by the sidewalk, looking around the empty, quiet road and wondering where to go.

Home wasn't an option. It was one am in and, by now, his parents would either be fucking loud or fighting. That was all they did nowadays. Their fights were so common that his older sister started staying at her boyfriend's house every weekend. Did they say something about it? No, of course not. They didn't even notice she wasn't home. (He was sure they hadn't noticed his absence after dinner as well.)

Mike was about to turn left, to go to Benny's diner for a burger, when something caught his eye. Actually, someone.

The girl was sitting on the other side of the road, between two cars, her legs open wide and her head between them as she threw up.

Mike thought about what to do. He should walk away, mind his own business like he did so far. If she was feeling sick, maybe she shouldn't have drunk too much, or maybe eaten better if she knew she was going to drink. And, after all, why should he go there? He didn't know her, did he? Well, maybe he did. Maybe she was a classmate of his.

Mike cursed himself before crossing the street and slowly approaching the girl. She had curly brown hair, he noticed, very short, hanging by her shoulders. She was wearing a tight yellow dress and, with her legs wide-opened, he could see her panties. Mike's eyes tried to avoid that area.

"Hey, do you need help?" He asked, hesitant.

The girl raised her head up. Her make-up was ruined, mascara leaving black trails in the corner of her eyes while her red lips were smudge with vomit.

Mike's eyes fell from her face to her dress's chest line. She was thin, too thin, yet there were curves, and he couldn't help but look at them.

"I'm... fine," the girl answered, her dirty lips curling into a grin. Her pupils were dilated, a clear sign that she was drunk.

Mike nodded, biting his bottom lip and gazing away from the girl's cleavage.

"But... are you here alone?" Mike tried.

The girl sat up straight, closing her legs and pushing her short dress down even though it barely covered anything. She turned to her right and grabbed a small black purse. She took her cell phone out.

"Well, yeah, but... best friend is making out with someone and boyfriend is clearly not caring about me," she confessed, showing Mike her cell phone. He didn't manage to catch anything on the screen before she added, "But what can we do, right?"

The girl put a strand of her curly hair behind the ear. Mike stared at her. He was sure he didn't know her. So, he just should walk away.

But something made him stay.

The girl noticed him standing there and raised her eyes to look at him properly. She tilted her head, curious, her mouth a bit open.

"Do I know you?" She asked.

Mike shrugged.

"I don't know you," he answered.

The girl kept her weird-looking smile on her face and then moved, a bit too clumsy, and patted the spot next to her, inviting him to sit down.

Mike went around the vomit and sat down next to her, keeping some distance between their bodies. From where he was, he could now see goosebumps over the girl's skin.

“Don’t you have a jacket?”

The girl finally noticed she had only her dress on, looking down at herself in surprise. She shrugged and said, “Lost it somewhere, I guess.”

Mike touched his jacket, wondering if he should give it to her.

Isn’t that something polite to do? Didn’t his mother teach him to be a gentleman? Sure she did, before she also taught him how to drink all day and shout at her husband in the middle of the night, waking her kids up.

How about his dad? What had he taught him about this kind of situations? To be a gentleman? Or to ignore the girl until she started yelling at him for being a piece-of-shit and an awful husband?

In the end, Mike gave the girl his jacket.

She took it, without saying a thank-you or acknowledging his nice gesture. As she put the jacket on, one of her feet slid forwards, splashing on the vomit. The girl noticed it, made a face and said, “Oh damn it,” but it sounded like she didn’t care much. Or had the will to care.

Mike licked his lips, gazing away from her and watching the street. From there, he could see the house party in which he had just been. For a second, he wondered if Lucas was still making out with the two girls.

Lucas and he had been friends for five years now. The Sinclair family had moved to Hawkins after Lucas’ mother had got a job opportunity in the local hospital. The boy had had to join the fifth-grade class halfway through the school year and, back then, their teacher had asked Mike to (basically) be the new kid’s tour-guide and tutor. Maybe it had been convenience, or maybe genuine empathy, but the two kids became best friends as time went by. That was why Mike still put up with Lucas’ weird, teenager-like behaviour.

“What’s your name?” The girl suddenly asked, reminding Mike of her presence. “Wait, no. Don’t tell me. I don’t want to know.”

Mike frowned. “Why?”

The girl offered a pleased smile.

“It’s better that way.”

Mike’s frown deepened.

“Well, okay...”

The girl grabbed her cell phone and played around for a while, her head tilted to the side. She started humming a song that Mike didn’t recognize.

He stayed there.

Why did he stay?

He could have gone to Benny’s to eat a burger. He could be having a friendly chat with the diner’s owner by now, or playing Angry Birds on his phone (he had installed it for his younger sister, but now he was addicted to it too).

Mike glanced at the girl. He could ask her if she wanted to go with him. But why? She didn’t even want to know his name. Why was there a part of him that demanded to be polite to others? Who had taught him to be like that?

Suddenly, the girl’s phone went off. Clumsily, she raised herself to her feet, using the car near her for support and stepped over her vomit. She picked up the phone, said a “hello, where are you?”, and walked away.

Mike watched her leave.

What an odd encounter he just had. And who could she be? Did she attend Hawkins High School? But it was such a small place. Wouldn’t he have seen her before?

When a cold, spine-freezing breeze blew, giving him chills, Mike realized the strange girl had left with his jacket. In his jacket, he had had his wallet.

Great.

Now what?

party number two: the lost wallet

“Maybe you could fill a complain at the police station,” his mother advised while she slowly stirred the mushrooms and bacon with tomato sauce.

Mike frowned, his eyes never leaving the Angry Birds’ game on his phone.

“Why?” He asked.

“Because you lost your wallet, Michael.”

Mike bit his tongue. He shouldn’t have told his mother about the wallet. But she would have found out sooner or later. After all, he had no I.D. or money now.

“It’s fine,” he muttered. “I’ll just get a new one.”

“And pay for a new I.D.?”

“Well, yeah,” he said, missing his target on the game and losing.

“You clearly haven’t had to work for a living,” his mother complained before putting down the wood spoon and left the kitchen, cleaning her hands in an old cloth.

Mike glared at his mother’s back. Why should he, at the age of fifteen, know what it was like to work for a living? Hadn’t his parents been working their asses off so that he didn’t have to know that until he was older, until he had a degree? His mother was always like this: she was either judging her kids about completely irrational things, or she was all over them, wanting to know more and more about them.

At least, his father was consistent. He never cared.

His phone buzzed with a message from Lucas.

Lucas: *Party tomorrow night. You in?*

Mike frowned. His first instinct was to say no. Why should he go to another party? To watch Lucas making out with random girls? To be attacked by girls' lips? To watch his classmates make bad decisions all over again? Parties were stupid. He had no reason to go.

The flicker of a curly, brown hair and a yellow dress flashed through his mind. The girl who had stolen his jacket. What if she was going to be there? What if a miracle happened and the girl still had his jacket and gave it back?

Mike replied to Lucas with a yes. He was weak like that.

His mother came back to the kitchen.

"All I'm saying, sweetie, is that you have to be more careful, okay?" His mother said and flashed him a sweet smile. "You have to be more careful with your stuff because they are your stuff, okay? No mine, not your father's, or sisters', but yours."

Mike's tense shoulders unconsciously relaxed.

"Okay, Mom."

Karen Wheeler flashed a happy smile at her only son before saying, "Good. Now can you go get your sisters? Dinner's ready."

On Saturday, Mike found himself at a stranger's house. Well, not a stranger-stranger; the house belonged to a guy from eleventh grade; a football player, to be more precise, since Lucas now liked to hang out

with football players. He kept saying he was going to join the team next year; all he had to do was work out enough for the next, what?, five or six months. Mike believed it was a waste of time since Lucas was smart enough to get a scholarship through his grades, and not football.

“You don’t get it, man,” Lucas remarked after taking his third consecutive shot with Mike. “I like football.”

Mike’s face was twisted in a grimace thanks to the drink and his friend’s comment.

“But why? You used to hate it.”

“No, I used not to have the body strength to play it,” Lucas argued.

Mike rolled his eyes.

“That’s a pathetic excuse,” he muttered.

“Let’s drink two more shots!” Lucas exclaimed, clearly ignoring Mike’s cynical and rude comment.

“What? Dude, no,” Mike complained. His head was dizzy enough with the three shots and the one beer he had already drunk.

But a shot went to his hands anyway, and he had to drink it. Then, Lucas left him all alone, going after a blonde girl who had sent him a seductive glance, and Mike stayed still in the middle of someone’s kitchen. Loud people surrounded him, and most of them bumped into him as they passed by. There were two girls eating chips right in front of him. One of them gave him a sneaky smile. Mike left.

He was not in the mood to make out with someone again.

In his short life – if fifteen years could be considered short -, Mike had kissed three different girls: Jennifer Hayes in fourth grade, because Mike had had a small crush on her and, one day, decided to be brave and talk to her; Maria Laine in sixth grade, because someone dared her to kiss someone and he had been that someone; and then that random girl in the last party he had gone to with Lucas.

Mike found himself inside a bedroom, probably the football player's, since there were some trophies on the shelves and dirty jerseys on the floor. He sat down on the kid's messy bed and looked around. He hadn't bothered to turn on the lights.

His bedroom was bigger and tidier than this one, yet there was some sense of... accomplishing and pride in here. Like, the kid was proud of who he was, and you could see it through his room. What did Mike have in his bedroom? Old photos? Toys from his childhood? What did that tell him about himself?

Being fifteen sucked, to be honest. Mike was happier when he was fourteen. Back then, his parents didn't fight, his sister didn't spend all her time with her boyfriend, and his younger sister wasn't a pain in the ass who was always watching TV and didn't let anyone else grab the remote. Lucas didn't want to get into football nor go to stupid parties.

The bedroom's door suddenly opened. A kid, maybe around Mike's age, or one year younger, walked in, a small shy smile on his lips. Behind him, a guy in a football jacket followed. The smiles on their faces vanished as soon as they found Mike in there.

"Who are you?" The football player asked, nervous. He glanced behind his shoulder.

"Mike?" The other boy said. "You're Mike Wheeler, right?"

"I'm out of here," the football player said and walked out of the bedroom fast.

The smaller boy stayed put, looking at the empty space left by the other teenager. He looked hurt.

Mike stood up.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't... I-"

What was he supposed to say?

"It's fine," the boy replied.

Mike hid his hands inside his jacket's pockets, feeling awkward. Had he just caught two closeted-kids on their way to make out in a dark room? One of them being a football player... Damn, should he fear for his life?

"I'm Will," the boy suddenly introduced himself.

Mike blinked.

"Will? Will... Byers?"

The boy nodded.

Mike recognized him from his American Literature class. Will was a very quiet person. Rumours said he had had a depression a few years ago and tried to kill himself.

"Could you—" Will licked his lips, nervous. "Not say anything?"

Mike nodded.

"Y-yeah, sure," he stuttered a bit.

Will Byers smiled softly, in a silent thank-you, before walking out of the room.

Mike waited a few seconds, staring at the dark-coloured rug under his feet, with no coherent thoughts on his mind – should he judge what had just happened? Should he be worried? Should he analyse it? -, and then walked out.

He was halfway through the corridor, almost getting to the stairs, when a door on the other side of the hallway opened, and a girl came out. Mike stopped still. Not only did he recognize the curly brown hair, but also the jacket the girl was wearing.

The girl stopped, seeing him standing there. A kind of *I-know-you* smile curled in her lips.

From downstairs, they could hear one of those commercial songs that everyone knew nowadays playing.

“Hello there, stranger,” the girl greeted, taking a few steps closer.

Mike gulped.

“You have my jacket,” he pointed out.

The girl looked down at herself before her eyes met Mike’s again and she smirked.

“Looks like you don’t need it anymore,” she remarked, motioning with her head to the jacket he was now wearing.

Mike was about to open his mouth and reply that he needed more than one jacket in his wardrobe when she suddenly opened his old jacket’s pocket and took out something black. She threw it at him. Mike grabbed it clumsily. It was his wallet.

“I didn’t steal money,” the girl said. “Nor did I look inside.”

Mike frowned.

“Look inside?”

The girl’s smile grew wider, showing off her white teeth.

“Yeah. I still don’t know your name, stranger.”

Mike looked confused.

Why didn’t she want to know who he was?

And why hadn’t he seen her at school during the week?

Did she even go to school?

“Where do you-“

Someone climbed up the stairs and stopped right in the middle of them. The guy was taller than Mike, blonde, wearing a huge black jacket, his jeans laying low on his waist. He looked at the girl and smiled.

“There you are, babe. I’ve been looking for you.”

The girl rolled her eyes.

“Right. Was that after or before you flirted with that girl?”

The guy let out a loud sigh and approached her. He wrapped his arms around her and started whispering. The girl kept her eyes away from him, clearly upset and refusing to give in to her boyfriend’s words.

Mike decided it was time to leave. He wasn’t going to stay around to watch a couple’s fight. He had enough of those at home. Besides, he had his wallet back, so no wasting his parents’ money on new I.D. and whatever.

He found Lucas sitting on one of the sofas in the living-room, clearly looking bored. Mike took the vacant seat next to him and smiled happily, showing him his wallet.

“Where did you find it?” Lucas frowned.

“A girl had it. She gave it back.”

Lucas’s face showed no signs of understanding his explanation.

“Let’s get out of here?” His friend asked instead.

Mike looked surprised. “Not enjoying yourself?”

Lucas glanced at someone in the dancing crowd before he shrugged and said, “Not really. Maybe next time.” He stood up and started walking away.

Mike chuckled to himself before following Lucas.

Maybe next time.

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

Happy Holidays, everyone!

I decided to post this today since I managed to finish writing another chapter, which was something I wasn't planning on doing since I have so much stuff to do for college.

If there are any grammar mistakes, I apologize.

party number three: Mickey meets Minnie

It was almost winter break when Lucas decided to take Mike to a party again. Well, truth be told, he had to beg the boy to come along since Mike hadn't been in the mood at all to go out. The last month had been nice without Lucas randomly deciding to party every Saturday night, but it looked like that was over now and he wanted to go wild again (if you could say that he indeed 'went wild' in parties).

This time they had to take a bus since walking there was practically impossible. Whoever was throwing this party lived in the fanciest neighbourhood of Hawkins, unlike Mike and Lucas who were neighbours in the middle-class city area.

"Whose house is it?" Mike asked.

"Troy Harrington."

Mike frowned, confused, and then made a face, remembering how his older sister was dating Steve Harrington.

"Maybe my sister will be here."

Lucas chuckled. "You scared to go now?"

Mike blinked, surprised with the question.

“What? No, I’m not.”

Maybe, deep down, he was a bit scared.

Nancy had been one of those typical popular girls in high school who everyone envied, yet wanted to be friends with. Mike had admired her for a while there, when he was younger, and she was in her junior year. But now he only saw her as someone who made a stupid, very stupid decision in her senior year. Instead of going off to a big college in a big city, Nancy was now taking a Psychology course in the Indiana University, just one hour away from home. That meant, she actually never left home and instead let her boyfriend drive her around everywhere. How stupid was it? And why did she do it? Mike remembered how she used to get excited when talking about going to New York or Chicago. Then, she started dating Steve and, well, maybe love blinded her.

As soon as they got to the house, Lucas grabbed Mike and took him to wherever the drinks were. They usually were in the kitchen, so that was where they went to grab two beers.

“That one,” Lucas said.

Mike looked at where he pointed and saw one of the cheerleaders. She was two years older than them.

“What about her?”

“I’m going to hook up with her tonight,” Lucas said proudly.

Mike snorted and took a sip of his beer. He didn’t have to say anything to Lucas understand he didn’t believe in him.

“I mean it,” Lucas pushed. “I’ve seen her looking at me.”

Mike still didn’t say anything, instead gave his friend a sympathetic smile.

After the third beer, they went separate ways: Luca found the spiritual courage to approach the cheerleader and Mike honestly

didn't want to be there to watch his friend get dumped in the middle of a crowded party. He went outside to the house's backyard. To the huge freaking backyard that the Harrington family owned. There were bushes in the shape of animals and a fountain. A freaking fountain.

How rich were those people?

Well, at least, now he understood why his sister had giving her college dreams up. Being in a relationship with a rich guy was better than working her ass off to be a successful independent woman. Right?

Mike approached the fountain. There were lights under the water, giving it a special blue-sparkling colour. It was kind of magical, Mike guessed. He turned around and leaned against it, enjoying his beer in quietness.

The entire mansion was lighted-up. Almost every window on the ground floor showed a room being used by someone, and there was a muffled sound coming from the house. Loud music was being played. Didn't the neighbours hear it? He could see people walking around, girls talking, couples making out. At some point, someone turned on a light on the first floor, and Mike chuckled. The monkeys had found the stairs to heaven. They were about to break the mansion. Troy Harrington would be in such trouble.

“Hey there Mickey.”

Mike's eyes fell from the mansion to the path in front of him. To his surprise, the curly brown-haired girl stood there, a bottle in her hand, and, once again, wearing his jacket.

Suddenly, his brain remembered how she had greeted him. He made a confused expression before looking down at himself. His t-shirt had the face of Mickey Mouse on it. He looked back at the girl and noticed her t-shirt: Minnie's face.

“Hey there Minnie,” he said back.

The girl chuckled and stepped closer until she could offer him her

bottle. It was wine.

“Thanks, but –“ Mike showed her his beer –“I’m good.”

The girl kept her mysterious smile on while taking the empty place next to him against the fountain.

“It’s a nice place, isn’t it?” She commented.

Mike nodded, once again looking at the mansion.

“Whose is it?” She asked.

“Troy Harrington,” he answered.

She made a face.

“No idea who he is.”

Mike chuckled.

“He goes to school with me.”

The girl didn’t say anything, preferring to take a sip from the bottle.

Mike licked his lips, feeling somehow nervous. Wasn’t it odd that they found each other once again, at some random a party, in a house that neither of them would ever step in if it weren’t for tonight’s event? Did this mean anything, or was Mike’s fifteen-year-old mind imagining things? He glanced at the girl, whose Minnie’s t-shirt was tucked inside a black skirt. The black tights she was wearing had small hearts all over them, and the jacket she had stolen from him went great with all her outfit.

Mike suddenly realized it was the second time he found her wearing it. Was it a usual thing for her to do? Shouldn’t he have cared that she kept the jacket?

“Isn’t it odd that we met again?” He suddenly asked. “And that you are wearing my jacket again,” he added with a small smile.

The girl looked at him, her big brown eyes studying him for a second.

“Coincidences happen,” she answered. “Maybe if I had decided to stay home tonight, we wouldn’t have met.”

“But you didn’t decide that,” Mike pointed out. “And I was indeed forced to come out tonight, so...”

The girl laughed.

“You were forced? Why?”

“My friend likes to party.”

“I like to party,” the girl remarked.

Mike pressed his lips together. “Well, yeah, but you’re not my best friend, who, despite being a great guy, makes me go out with him every single time, and then leaves me all by myself while he tries to hook up with cheerleaders.”

The girl looked surprised and offered her bottle of wine to Mike again, but he decided to drink his beer till the last drop.

“Why do guys always go after cheerleaders?” The girl asked with a hint of curiosity in her voice.

“I don’t go after cheerleaders,” Mike answered, feeling offended. “But... I usually don’t go after girls.”

The girl went quiet, her lips pressed against the bottle’s rim, thoughtful.

“So, you’re gay?” She asked him after a while.

“Oh, no,” Mike replied. “I just... Well-“ he made a face -“I’m not gay.”

The girl – boy, did he wish he had a name to give her - looked confused.

“You’re a weird-- How old are you?”

“Fifteen.”

“You’re a weird fifteen-year-old guy,” she finished her thought.

“No, I’m not,” Mike argued.

The girl raised her eyebrow, challenging him.

“What? It’s weird that I don’t make a fool of myself going after girls who clearly don’t want anything from me?”

“Yes.”

Mike was not expecting so much honesty from the girl.

“What’s your name?” He asked.

“Not telling you that, Mickey.”

“Don’t have to be the real name,” he said. The girl looked at him with interest. “You can... call me Mickey, for instance. That’s not my real name.” It didn’t matter that it was the closest name to his real one, though.

The girl thought about it for a second, nursing her bottle of wine.

“Hum, okay... You can call me... Eleven.”

Mike blinked.

“Eleven.”

“Yes. Is there a problem?”

“None at all, ... Eleven.”

They shared a smile. Mike took the time to analyse every detail of Eleven’s face. She had a clean skin, red soft-looking lips and her big brown eyes were teasing him. They always teased him.

Mike’s phone suddenly went off, his obnoxious ringtone, chosen by his younger sister, ruining the moment he just had with Eleven.

“Yes?” He said, picking it up.

“Where are you, man?” Lucas asked. “I want to go home.”

“Why? Tired of the cheerleader?”

“The bitch has a boyfriend. I’m sure he’s after me.”

Mike stood up straight, worried.

“Where are you?”

“On the street, behind a black car. Let’s go, man. We can grab a taxi a few streets away from here. My treat.”

“Okay, I’ll be right there.” Mikey hung up and turned to Eleven. “I have to-“

“Go, yeah,” the girl finished for him, her lips upturned. “I understood that by the call. Well, -“ She stood up straight and turned to him –“Nice seeing you again, Mickey.”

“Nice seeing you too, Eleven,” Mike replied, and then walked away.

party number four: mamihlapinatapai

Eleven was on his mind when he least expected. Sometimes he would be in class and he would remember how she drunk straight from a bottle of wine. Other times, he would be doing his homework and a flash of her smile would appear on his mind. At night, right after he laid down, he would go over their three encounters and wondered why they had happened. And why had he let her keep his jacket?

His birthday had come and gone, just like New Year’s Eve. It sucked to have your birthday on such an important holiday. People cared less about it since they’d rather celebrate the new year. And then, it was so close to Christmas that all his presents sucked, and his parents barely remembered it in the middle of such exhausting holidays (they were only exhausting because they liked to invite everyone to their

freaking house, but who was Mike to judge?).

“What you need is a drink,” Lucas started.

Mike groaned. He knew what was coming.

“Harrington is throwing a party-“

“Again? What, he didn’t learn with the last one?” Mike snorted.

The Harrington’s mansion had been left a bit ruined after the party last December. People had broken windows, stolen some jewellery from his mother, and peed in basically every corner of the house – turns out, having four available bathrooms hadn’t been enough for Troy Harrington’s drunk guests.

“His parents are rich enough to get two mansions just like that one, man,” Lucas said. “Of course, he’s going to keep throwing parties. So, we’re going. It’s on Friday.”

Mike’s face turned into a grimace for a moment before he smiled at Lucas, who seemed excited about the party.

In the back of his head, all he thought was: *Maybe Eleven will be there.*

And she was.

She was sitting on the kitchen’s table giving people drinks, whether it was beers, shots or plastic cups with vodka and something else. She was enjoying her role of bartender, wearing a white dress and ripped, black tights. Mike’s jacket wasn’t part of her outfit tonight, and he felt kind sad about it.

That was, until he approached her and, with a mischievous grin, Eleven offered him a beer. He felt completely at peace, thanking her for the drink. Next to him, Lucas asked for something too.

“You two know each other?” Eleven asked, curious.

Mike nodded, opting for the safer answer of a simple gesticulation, while Lucas took a sip from his beer. Then, he stupidly decided to say, “Oh, Mi-“

Mike elbowed Lucas' side. The boy let out a groan. "Dude, what the hell?"

Eleven raised an eyebrow, noticing what he did. His real name had almost been given away. Mike couldn't lose whatever he had going on with Eleven because Lucas opened his damn mouth.

"Let's get out of here," Eleven suggested, giving one last drink to a girl with ponytails. Then, she graciously jumped out of the table, grabbed Mike's elbow and pulled him away from the crowd.

Lucas just watched them leave, amazed by the entire scene *and* by the girl's legs. If Mike was hitting that, he was a lucky bastard.

Eleven guided Mike to the place they had met the last time, Harrington's backyard, near the dazzling fountain. This time, instead of leaning against it, Eleven used Mike's body strength to raise herself up and sit on the fountain's edge. Then, she patted the empty spot next to her, offering it to Mike. He followed her orders, like a silly puppy who did not know better.

"You don't have a drink," he finally noticed.

Eleven smirked and reached to a hidden pocket in her white dress. She took out a joint and a pink lighter.

Mike stared at her in amazement, his mouth falling open and eyes fixed on the joint.

"I made a vow with myself," the girl admitted. "No drinking for a month. But that's it. No drinking." The corner of her lips turned up. "That doesn't mean I can't smoke."

Mike blinked, his entire being still amazed by the girl in front of him. The stranger he called Eleven. The stranger who did not want to know his name, who had stolen his jacket, who kept running into him. Or he kept running into her...

"How old are you?" He asked.

"Sixteen," she said. "You?"

“Same.” He licked his lips. “It was my birthday... Three weeks ago.”

Eleven paused for a second, her mind clearly doing maths.

“Before or after New Year?”

“On New Year’s... Eve.”

The girl’s mouth fell open in surprise. She pulled herself together and put the joint between her lips, lighting it up.

“That’s fun, right?” She wondered, exhaling a puff of smoke. “Your birthday being the last day of the year... A day that everyone celebrates.”

“It sucks,” Mike replied and took a sip from his beer. A long sip. “Everyone forgets it’s my birthday.”

“Oh.”

Eleven didn’t know what to say, he noticed, and that made him chuckle.

“It’s fine,” he lied.

The girl looked at him intently. Her big, brown eyes were scrutinizing him as he tried to hide the truth behind a poker face.

“You’re lying, aren’t you?”

“Aren’t we all?” He asked back.

The girl’s eyebrows went up in surprise before she chuckled and took a long drag from the joint.

They were quiet for a while. Just like the other time he was there, Mike found himself staring at the mansion, at all the windows and movements happening inside the place. Unlike what had happened at the last party, there were more people exploring the backyard. Mike and Eleven didn’t have as much privacy as the last time. But why would they even need privacy? Mike knew she had a boyfriend. They had briefly met once too. Well, he had seen the guy.

“How’s your boyfriend?” Mike found himself asking.

“Ex now,” Eleven answered, exhaling the joint’s smoke. “He was a bit of... a brat.”

Mike’s lips pressed together in an uncertain smile. Should he be happy? Should he ask her if she was doing okay?

But they weren’t friends.

God, they didn’t even know each other’s names.

“Mamihlapinatapai,” Eleven suddenly said.

Mike frowned, confused.

“I’m sorry, what?”

The girl smiled. “Do you know what it means?”

“I don’t even know how to pronounce it,” Mike confessed. Eleven giggled. “What does it mean?” He asked next, curious.

“It means ‘a look between two people suggesting an unspoken desire’,” Eleven translated, eyeing him.

Mike stared back at her in amazement.

“How do you know that?”

Eleven was quiet for a second, giving him a very serious look, before confessing, “Internet, duh,” with a goofy smile on her face.

Mike, caught in surprise, laughed.

“Right, internet.”

Eleven put the joint out against the cold stone of the fountain and then threw it to the floor.

Mike stared at her from the corner of his eye. He wondered why she had told him that word’s meaning. Did it have to do with them? Did they have an unspoken desire for each other? Did he feel that?

Well, sure. Mike had to be honest with himself; he thought a lot about Eleven and their unspoken meetings; their ‘coincidences happen’- bullshit. It had to mean something, right? Why did he keep bumping into her? Why did they keep having these private chats with each other if there wasn’t something cooking right under their nose?

“Mickey?” Eleven called and, for a second, he almost didn’t react to it.

It’s Mike, he wanted to say, but was scared she would leave and never come back if he told her his real name.

“Yeah?”

“Did you get a midnight kiss in New Year’s Eve?”

“You mean, on my birthday?” Mike joked. The girl kept staring at him. He coughed. “No, I-I didn’t have a midnight kiss.”

How could he? He spent the day surrounded by family, his parents, his sisters, uncles and aunts, stupid cousins. Who could he have kissed at midnight?

“Mickey,” Eleven called again, her hand touching his chin and turning his head to her.

Before he could register what was happening, Eleven leaned up and kissed him on the lips. It was a quick kiss, he barely had the time to taste her, to know how her lips felt like, before she was pulling away.

“Happy Birthday, Mickey,” she said, her lips curled in a sincere smile. “And Happy New Year.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Kudos & Comments make my day.

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

I clearly don't know what to do with all my free time until classes begin again because I should be working on some essays instead of writing this fic.

If there are any grammar mistakes, I apologize. You know the drill.

party number five: the bottle of vodka

“I don’t get it,” Lucas said, confused.

Mike rolled his eyes. He didn’t know how to explain it to Lucas anymore.

“What’s there not to get?” He asked.

“You don’t know her name?”

Mike shook his head.

“You don’t have her phone number?”

Another no.

“You... have never seen her at school?”

“Nope,” Mike said.

Lucas frowned, confused.

“But you guys keep meeting at parties?”

Mike shrugged and nodded. Yeah, that was practically it.

“I don’t get it!” Lucas exclaimed.

Mike groaned, tired of retelling the story to Lucas and getting the same feedback. There wasn’t any simpler way to explain it to him. The story was that: he and Eleven didn’t know each other’s names because she didn’t want, they didn’t know each other from outside parties, and they only met by accident, never planning to hang out. It was a weird story, yeah, but it was the truth, and Mike didn’t know how else to tell it to Lucas.

And why on earth did he decide to tell Lucas about Eleven?

Oh yeah, because she had kissed him. The fourth girl ever to kiss him, and he didn’t even know her name despite really wanting to.

Benny, a big guy, the owner of Benny’s diner (obviously enough), passed by their table and offered them a small plate of French fries.

“Thanks, Benny,” Mike and Lucas said at the same time.

They had been studying for the last three hours since classes ended. Most kids went to the library or home to study, but Mike and Lucas liked to do it in loud environments, preferably where there was food. Benny’s place was the right one to do so, and their favourite since the owner knew them and liked to present them with small offerings in the shape of French fries or cokes.

When Mike checked the time on his cell phone, he saw it was almost seven pm. His mother would want him home by eight for dinner, but he didn’t feel like eating thanks to all the fries he had eaten throughout the afternoon.

Lucas was still engrossed in his studying. They had two big tests next week: Biology and American Literature. It was ridiculous the amount of time they took to study for those two subjects alone. Mike couldn’t wait to get to college. Well, if until then, he realized what he wanted to study. It was hard to decide. He liked writing stories, making things up, but he also liked facts and science.

The diner’s door opened. Mike’s eyes raised up, his mind already too distracted by any kind of noise to study for the hundredth-time

literature methods of characterization. To his surprised, he found Will Byers. Quiet Will Byers walking all by himself, his schoolbag hanging by his left shoulder, his eyes barely visible behind his bangs. Yet, his gaze met Mike's. A moment of panic flickered through Will's eyes as he recognized Mike and remembered the last time they saw each other.

But Mike didn't want Will to be scared, so he motioned with his hand for him to approach them. Lucas noticed it and looked around, confused, until his eyes landed on Will Byers walking up to them.

“What the hell?” Lucas whispered before the boy arrived.

“Have a seat, Will,” Mike offered, motioning with his hand to the empty seat in front of him and Lucas. “You can study with us.”

Lucas kept giving Mike weird glances. Oblivious and shy, Will thanked him and sat down in front of them. He slowly took out his books and a stack of white papers, getting himself ready for long hours of studying.

“You know, we aren-“

“What are you going to study?” Mike interrupted Lucas.

Will looked at them, scared.

“Ah... Hum... American Literature.”

“We're studying that too!” Mike exclaimed, too overly excited.

Lucas sent him another glare.

Will's lips jerked into a hesitant smile.

Mike barely saw Will Byers in school. They only had one class in common - American Literature – and they tended to hang out in different crowds (Mike was usually forced to sit as near as possible from the football team because of Lucas).

“Don't you guys find The Great Gatsby fascinating?” Will asked, eyes sparkling.

Mike and Lucas shared a frowning look.

“Well, I’d rather read *The Scarlet Letter*,” Mike confessed. “Looks like a more interesting story.”

“Oh, really?” Will sounded surprised. “I don’t think I’ve started reading that one.”

Mike offered a gentle smile. “We’ll probably read it next year.”

“Oh, cool.”

Lucas kept himself out of the conversation, eyeing both his friend and the quiet kid from American Literature class. Since when did Mike know Will Byers?

There was no opportunity for the two friends to talk throughout the rest of the night. Around ten pm, Lucas’ father came to pick him up. Shortly after, Joyce Byer’s car parked in front of the diner and Will said his goodbyes.

Mike was left to ride his bike home alone. He didn’t mind, actually. He enjoyed the moments he got to be alone.

It couldn’t be a party if it were just the two of them, could it?

Mike had been walking home from Benny’s diner, at seven pm, when he saw her. She was standing in front of a small grocery store owned by this immigrant family from South America, arms crossed in front of her chest, her foot tapping the ground.

Mike approached her in slow steps, taking in the way she was dressing – black tights under a pink dress and, to his surprise, his jacket -, and how her hair was done into two weird ponytails. She had what looked like two balls of hair on top of her head, with some loose strands falling from them.

“Eleven,” he said.

She jumped, surprised, but smiled as soon as she recognized him.

“Mickey Mouse.”

Funnily enough, he was wearing the Mickey’s t-shirt, the mouse’s face smiling at Eleven, with his big ears and red bowtie.

“What are you doing here?” He asked, curious, stepping closer. He looked inside the grocery shop, seeing someone at the cashier.

“I want to buy booze,” Eleven said.

Mike frowned.

“I thought you were on a break from that.”

“It’s over.” The smile that followed her sentence was full of mischief, yet with a hint of innocence.

Mike found himself smiling back. It was such a subconscious thing to do: smile back at Eleven because, looking at her face, he genuinely felt the happiness curling up in his lips.

“But,” the girl suddenly frowned, looking inside the grocery shop, “they don’t let me buy vodka.”

Mike’s eyebrows arched up in surprise as he asked, “They have vodka in the shop?”

“I think they do, they just refuse to tell me where,” Eleven replied, crossing her arms and puckering her lips as if she were a small kid pouting.

Mike smiled again, his eyes hooked on her mouth for a second; then he reminded himself to behave.

She was a stranger, after all.

“Maybe... they really don’t have vodka. Ah,...” Mike coughed, feeling awkward. “We can go somewhere else to buy it?”

Eleven raised her head, interested, and uncrossed her arms. She approached him, her soft hand grabbing his arm, her big brown eyes looking up at him in hope.

“Really?”

Mike’s mouth went dry.

“S-sure.”

Sharing a smile, they walked side by side down the street, Mike pointing out the direction with a very shy finger. Eleven’s face was frozen on a wide smile, her ponytails swinging at the rhythm of her steps.

“So, how was school?” Mike asked in a stupid attempt of getting to know her better. “I know Mrs. Montez kills me with Spanish homework.”

Eleven glanced at him. The smile never left her face, but something flickered across her eyes. She knew what he was trying to do.

“I don’t know Mrs. Montez.”

“Who do you have for Spanish, then? I mean, if you have Spanish,” Mike added the last bit quickly, feeling nervous.

Eleven breathed out a soft chuckle.

“My uncle.”

Mike frowned.

“Your uncle teaches you Spanish?”

“For now, yeah.”

Mike stared at her. Yet, Eleven didn’t react at all to his gaze. She had understood what he was trying to do and was playing her side of the game as she wished.

“Why?” Mike dared to ask.

Eleven sighed. “Why are you trying to know more about me?”

“I’m curious,” Mike admitted. “Can’t I be curious about the girl I keep finding at parties, but never outside of them?”

Eleven crooked a half-smile. “This isn’t a party,” she reminded him and motioned with her arms to the street around them.

“It can be,” Mike suggested.

The girl stopped walking and eyed him carefully. Her brown eyes sparkled with curiosity and desire for something fun.

“Okay, Mickey,” Eleven said after a while. “Let’s party together, then. Get me a bottle of vodka.”

And that was what Mike did. They got to the supermarket, Mike talked to a friend of his (actually, not a friend, but a guy he usually helped out by doing his essays and sending him the answers to tests), who worked in the stockroom of the place. The guy got them two bottles of vodka, one of lemon juice and one of water for half the price. Mike promised to do his History essay in exchange for that as well.

“So, you’re smart,” Eleven remarked.

They were sitting behind a garbage bin in an alley, mixing the drinks up.

“Why do you say that?” Mike asked, holding the bottle of lemon juice carefully while Eleven poured the vodka inside. The bottle of water had already been prepared and put inside Mike’s backpack.

“The guy literally asked you to do his History essay in front of me, like it’s no big deal... So, I assume he usually asks that of you, and if you were dumb, you wouldn’t be asked to do someone else’s work,” Eleven replied.

“Ah, yeah. I like History, and I don’t mind writing about it,” Mike said. At least, the guy hadn’t called Mike by his name in front of Eleven. How ironic was it that he now lived in fear that someone would call him by his own name in front of a girl? “Do you like

History?”

Before replying, Eleven closed the bottle of mixed drinks and shook it a bit. Then, she opened it again and tasted it. She smiled approvingly.

“Yeah, I like History. But I prefer playing sports.”

Mike blinked.

“Really?”

“Yeah. Especially team sports.”

“Why?”

Eleven took a sip from the bottle and handed it to Mike before saying, “I don’t know. I just do. Don’t you have likes and dislikes just because?”

Mike went quiet. He had no answer for her, so he took a long sip from the bottle, ignoring the burning taste of cheap vodka going down his throat. The lemon juice barely covered it.

“Jeez,” Mike coughed. “This... this is strong.”

Eleven took the bottle from him.

“If you don’t like it, then I can have it all.” A smirk followed her remark.

Mike rolled his eyes and took the bottle back.

“No way. I’m not going to write a History essay on the American Revolution for you to drink it all.”

“But I thought you liked History?” The girl replied, trying to get the bottle, but Mike kept it far away from her reach. “Come on, Mickey.”

Mike said nothing. Instead, he pulled the bottle to his mouth and took a long sip, his eyes defying Eleven in a non-verbal battle, while she pretended to be unamused, but failing as a smile crept on her lips.

Mike put the bottle down and cleaned his mouth with his jacket's sleeve. Then, he offered it to Eleven.

"Anyway, can I ask you something?"

Eleven smirked and was about to reply, but Mike cut her off by saying, "And don't you dare to say, 'you've already asked', please."

Eleven chuckled.

"Okay, ask me."

"If you had got the bottle of vodka at the grocery store, where would you have gone?" Mike asked, motioning with his hand to the bottle in her hands.

Eleven passed it back to him. "Well, probably some place random. And I'd probably be drinking just vodka."

"Alone?"

"Yeah."

"That's... sad."

Eleven laughed and tried to hit him on the arm, but he dodged her hand fast, only her fingers touching the material of his jacket.

"Thanks, Mickey. That's really nice to hear. Now, give me the bottle."

"No," Mike replied, teasing.

Eleven raised an eyebrow.

"No?"

Mike shook his head and brought the bottle to his lips, taking a slow sip from it while teasing Eleven with his eyebrows.

He barely knew her, he realized that, but he felt rather comfortable in her presence.

Was it the no-name thing that helped him relaxed? Knowing that she

would never know who he was – how nerd and stupid Mike Wheeler could be – might be giving him the strength to be... who he actually was. Or to simply create a character and be that character while with her. She wouldn't judge him. Or, if she did, she would be judging Mickey, not Mike.

“Mickeey,” Eleven sang as she went up on her knees and then leaned forwards in his direction, her hands coming to rest on his shoulders.

Mike's eyes went wide as he watched her face slowly coming closer to his. He looked down at her lips for a second before they met his. Eleven's lips were soft. Eleven's breathes were soft. Eleven's skin against his was soft. Everything was soft.

Suddenly, the bottle was out of his hands. Eleven pulled back and sat down on the dirty floor again, enjoying her small victory.

Mike stared at her, his mouth hanging open. He felt betrayed.

It was like they were playing a game. A secret game with two fictional players whose names were Mickey and Eleven. But what was the goals of the game? What were the rules? And why had he decided to play?

“Is this part of the game as well?” He found himself asking.

Eleven frowned, confused, while drinking the rest of the vodka in one long sip.

She cleaned her mouth with the back of her hand before asking, “What game?”

Mike blinked, realizing he had not made any sense.

“Never mind.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Kudos & Comments make my life. I honestly want to know what you guys think of this fic since I'm playing around with it a bit and I'm still not sure what I'll be writing until I get to the ending that I

have in mind.

4. Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

If there are any grammar mistakes, I apologize.

party number six: the game

He hadn't seen her in almost a month. February had come and gone, and March was almost over. The weather was warming up, and Spring was on its way, leaving small signs in Hawkins public gardens and people's good mood.

But Mike felt sad.

He hadn't seen Eleven in almost a month. He had gone to two parties and had only caught a glimpse of her once: as he went into the bathroom and she came out of a bedroom with a guy behind her. He had recognized the guy as one of the football players from the Hawkins High School team, a jerk who had a girlfriend. At least, that was what Lucas said when Mike pointed him out a few days later during lunch time. And now, every time Mike passed by that football player in the hallways, he had to pull himself together before asking him who Eleven was, what her name was, and what they did in that bedroom.

To be honest, Mike felt angry.

If he and Eleven were playing a game, he was the one getting too invested in it.

What kind of sixteen-year-old boy gets too invested in a girl whose name she doesn't want him to know? A girl he barely sees and, when he sees, she's drunk or high, and at a party?

A flicker of Eleven drunk laughing at him before kissing the corner of his lips flashed through his mind in the middle of History class, as the teacher impatiently waits for an answer from the class, and Lucas, besides him, snores quietly.

The last time they were together was fun, Mike reminded himself. And it had been just the two of them. Eleven and he had wandered around the city, doing nothing but talking, dancing on the street and laughing, until they parted ways at three am. He had left her by a taxi, making sure she got in safely, before walking home.

“So, anyone knows the answer or not?” The teacher asked loudly.

Mike looked up, blinking confused. He had not heard the question at all, his mind too mingled with memories of Eleven. They had kissed a few times that last night together, but always in such a teasing way, quick pecks of lips touching followed by happy smiles.

What did it mean? Was she using him? Was he using her? For what?

The worst part, if he were complete honest, wasn’t the fact that they might be using each other, but rather if she was using other people as well. That would mean he wasn’t special in her life. She might have a dozen of Mickeys out there.

Luca suddenly woke up, his head falling back, eyes wide-opened as if he had got scared with something. Then, he looked around, confused, and at the clock on the wall behind the teacher. He groaned, “Fucking hell. Still one hour left.”

“Hey Lucas,” Mike called.

“Yeah?”

“Are there any parties happening this weekend?”

Lucas looked surprised, before realizing the reasons behind Mike’s question.

“You thinking about that girl?”

Mike shook his head.

Lucas raised an eyebrow.

“Well, yeah,” Mike admitted. “I need to talk to her.”

Lucas snorted, closing his notebook in a way that said he was done with the class already. “What can you possibly have to say to a stranger?”

She's no stranger.

“Just tell me if there's a party, please,” Mike asked politely.

“I don't know, man. I'll ask around and tell you later,” Lucas promised.

Later came right after classes ended. Mike was doing his homework when Lucas texted him, saying Friday night Jennifer Hayes would be throwing a small party that everyone was going to crash (she just didn't know yet). She had a big house and her parents rarely left her all by herself, so people were excited to get drunk and smash the Hayes' place. Teenagers could be awful people.

The scream that Jennifer Hayes let out as she saw her house being invaded by a bunch of wild teenagers holding bottles and bottles of alcoholic drinks was loud and high-pitched. She yelled at people to get out, but no one listened and, soon, the music changed into something funkier and, next thing you knew, furniture was being moved around while Jennifer tried her best to grab all the expensive decoration and hide it somewhere.

Sitting on a public bench, Mike and Lucas shared a bottle of wine while watching the big, white mansion of the Hayes turn into a hell of teenagers. Deep down, Mike pitied Jennifer. She was quite a nice girl, always very polite and anti-bullying at school. Plus, she had been his first kiss, so Mike had a soft place for her in his heart.

“I really want to call the cops and watch everyone lose their minds,” Lucas suddenly admitted.

Mike chuckled, taking the bottle of wine from his friend's hands.

“And lose your opportunity to make out with Katniss Everdeen?”

“She does look like Katniss Everdeen, doesn’t she?!” Lucas’ lips curled into a bright smile. “The minute I saw her with her hair braided I thought that!”

“I know, Lucas. You told me that like a dozen times now.” Mike took a sip from the bottle, made a face at the sour, cheap taste of the wine, and asked, “What’s her name?”

Lucas shrugged.

“Dunno. I’m gonna find out tonight.” He stood up, fixed his jacket and smiled at Mike. “Wish me luck, my friend.”

“Good luck, Lucas,” Mike replied, rising the bottle in a small toast.

Lucas took a deep breath and started walking towards the house, where he had seen the cute girl with her dark brown hair in a big braid go in just half an hour ago. Yet, he stopped before he was too far from Mike and turned back. “Good luck in finding your stranger girl, Mike.”

Mike’s lips twisted in small smile. “Thanks, Lucas.”

His friend was gone a few moments later, walking into the big white house of the Hayes with determination and spontaneous courage given by alcohol.

All by himself with a bottle of wine, Mike drank peacefully, his eyes always wandering around, ears paying attention to any kind of sound. He looked like a man who was waiting for the bus to come and take him.

No. He looked like someone waiting for something. For someone.

A friend. A lost lover.

Eleven.

He kept drinking and drinking, the taste of bad wine getting lost somewhere between the first and second hour of waiting. He grabbed

his phone and played Angry Birds, losing time after time. He grew frustrated and drunk.

In front of him, there were flashes of loud screams and people enjoying themselves. This was a party. What was he doing?

“Hey, Mickey Mouse.”

Mike looked up, his heart skipping a bit.

There she was.

Eleven walked down the front yard of the Hayes' property, in her hand a bottle of vodka. She was wearing a blue silky skirt with a yellow blouse. Her shoes were all white and very classic, while her hair was up in a perfect ponytail.

Mike suddenly realized that every time he saw Eleven, she looked like a different person: her outfits were never in the same style-line. She could be wearing all black one time, and in the next she would look like an angel.

“You’ve run out of drink,” she noticed and offered him her bottle of vodka. “Sorry, no lemon juice today.”

Mike stared at her.

Eleven frowned, the hand offering the vodka faltering. “What’s wrong?”

Why him? Why the football player?, Mike wanted to ask, but, honestly, what were the chances of Eleven remembering that guy?

“Nothing.” Mike accepted the vodka and took a long sip.

Eleven sat down next to him, her brown eyes studying him. She knew him. Although they barely knew each other, they, somehow, knew how to read one another.

“What’s wrong?” She asked again.

“Nothing,” he repeated and drank a bit more of vodka before handing

the bottle back to her. “Enjoying the party?”

Eleven made a face, taking the bottle back and drinking.

“Not really. My boyfriend is acting like a dick and-“

“You’ve got a new boyfriend?”

There was a pause.

“Yeah,” Eleven admitted. “His name is-“

“I don’t care,” Mike interrupted. Eleven raised an eyebrow. “If you don’t want to know my name, then I don’t want to know your boyfriend’s name.”

The corner of Eleven’s mouth turned up. “That’s different.”

Mike narrowed his eyes and looked at her, confused. “How?”

“He doesn’t matter to this game.”

The shock was evident in Mike’s eyes, yet Eleven decided to ignore it and keep drinking her vodka. She waited for him to say something.

So, there was a game. Mike had made it up out of blue the other time they were together, but Eleven had just agreed. They were playing a fucking game.

“What are the rules?” He asked.

“No names,” Eleven said as if it was obvious. And it was.

Mike waited for more, but nothing came.

“Just that? That’s the only fucking rule?”

Eleven smiled and nodded.

Mike shook his head, incredulous, and took the bottle back, drinking a long sip.

“What’s the goal?” He asked next, after cleaning his mouth with his

jacket's sleeve.

"There has to be a goal?"

"All games have goals. Levels. Stuff like that."

Eleven thought for a while, her eyebrows furrowed together.

"I don't know. What goal do you want this to have?"

Mike shrugged, like he didn't know, but then he said, "To know your name."

Eleven laughed. "The only rule we have—"

"When the right time comes," Mike finished. That caught Eleven's attention. "When it's right, we'll know each other's names."

Eleven considered his argument. Then, she offered her hand.

"Deal."

Mike shook her hand, feeling the softness of her skin tightened around his.

"Deal," he repeated.

They spent the rest of the night together, drinking until there was no more vodka, surprising each other with small gestures like holding hands or touching each other's noses (for some reason, that made Eleven giggle every time), and always, always talking about the most random things that came up to their minds.

Only when the right time came, they would talk about important stuff.

party number seven: the party that wasn't

Mike had sneaked out of his house around one in the morning, after the shouting between his mother and father decreased, and they finally went to bed. They had been fighting about Ted Wheeler's working hours. Karen complained he worked too many long hours, sometimes spending the night out (as if she didn't know why he spent the nights out), and Ted fought back saying that someone had to put food and pay the bills in that house. Mike was the only of the three kids at home listening to them, Holly was sleeping over at a friend's house and Nancy was probably with her boyfriend.

It was awful. Mike walked down the street with the memory of them shouting echoing in his head, giving him a headache. It was like a drumming in his ears: his father's voice, then his mother's voice, then both together. Didn't they know their kids had to sleep at night?

When it got too much, Mike grabbed his phone and asked a few people from school if there was a party happening (he knew Lucas stayed at home taking care of his little sister). He got an answer from someone saying that something was happening at the Harrington's place, but they weren't sure if it was an open party or not. Mike decided to go nonetheless.

He walked for quite a long time, the Harrington family lived in the fancy side of Hawkins, while his family didn't, and Mike almost decided to call it quits. Of course, something stopped him: the thought of seeing Eleven once again. If there was a chance of seeing her, he would walk miles for that.

However, the night had something else planned for him. Mike sometimes questioned how the universe worked; if there was such thing as fate, or if all coincidences just happen to join up and look like destiny. Either way, fate or not, the universe had wanted Mike to find Will Byers; or better, to crash against the boy as he came running from between two houses.

Will panicked when his body crashed against Mike's, wobbling back due to the impact. When his green eyes met Mike, they widened, and he stuttered something inaudible while looking behind his shoulder so many times he looked like a broken toy. A scared broken toy.

"Will, are you okay?" Mike asked.

Out of blue, Will started crying. Mike looked at the houses behind the boy, wondering who lived there. But Will started to gasp loud between cries, and Mike decided to take him out of that street, dropping an arm around the boy's shoulders and pushing him to start walking away from there.

They walked for a while, Mike not sure where to go with the boy.

His home wasn't an option. God, not even he wanted to be there, let alone someone like Will who was clearly not having the best night of his life.

"Do you want to go home?" Mike asked after a while, and then wondered where the hell Will Byers lived, and how could they get there.

"No," Will muttered and sniffled. Tears kept streaming down his face, but he wasn't panicking as much as before. "I told m-mom I wouldn't c-come home to-tonight. S-she w-will ask q-questions if I s-show up."

Mike paused, concerned. "Well, I don't know where to take you," he admitted shortly after.

Will stopped walking, making Mike stop as well. He put his hand inside his jacket and took his phone out. He texted something to someone, and then waited for a reply.

"Let's go," Will said after he got an answer. He looked around and then pointed to the street they had just crossed. "That way."

"Where are we going?" Mike asked.

"Friend's house."

After walking for about fifteen minutes, they arrived at a white small-town-typical house with a red welcome-carpet at the door and a wooden swing chair in the porch. The place was actually not that far from Mike's house. He was sure he had passed by it a few times with Lucas, but he had never taken the time to know who lived there.

As it turned out, a curly-haired boy with a huge-ass grin and a bit of fatness around his waist lived there. Mike recognized him from

school.

“Hello. Dustin Henderson.” The boy held his hand up for Mike to shake. “You’re Wheeler, right?”

Mike nodded as he shook Dustin’s hand.

“Y-yeah. I didn’t- “In the corner of his eye, he noticed Will walking into the house and making his way to somewhere down the hallway –“know you lived so close to me.”

Dustin chuckled. “Well, yeah. I do. For like ten years now, man.”

Mike blinked, surprised. Dustin waved his hand like it didn’t matter and welcomed him in. They walked down the same hallway Will had gone and Mike found himself in a teenager boy’s bedroom whose walls were covered in Star Wars, Harry Potter and, funnily enough, The Hunger Games’ posters. He had a king-sized bed with sheets unravelled – a clear sign that the boy had already gone to bed before Will texted him - and a huge TV screen right in front of it, with a PlayStation under it. There was a film paused in the TV.

“What film is it?” Mike asked, following Dustin’s lead and sitting on the bed.

Dustin pressed play before saying, “Captain Fantastic. Have you seen it?”

Mike shook his head.

“Great movie,” Dustin remarked. “You’re gonna like it a lot.”

Why did Dustin talk to him like was going to stay? Like he was a friend?

Suddenly, they heard water running. Mike looked at the open door. The bathroom was on the other side of the hallway, right in front of the bedroom.

“What’s his problem?” Mike asked. “I found him coming out of someone’s house and he started crying out of the blue... He.. He looked scared.”

Dustin sniffed, rubbing his nose a few times with his thumb, before saying, “Well, man, it’s life, you know? There’s crushing on someone you know you don’t have any chances with, and then there’s crushing on the asshole I-will-never-come-out-of-the-closet-but-I-like-it-when-you-suck-my-dick popular football player.”

Mike had a flashback of the night he caught Will walking inside someone’s bedroom followed by one of the guys in the football team. So, that hadn’t been an almost one-night-stand; that happened a lot of times behind everyone’s back.

“But the guy is a real asshole,” Dustin continued. Suddenly, he went quiet and looked over at Mike. “I shouldn’t have told you this. Fuck. Will is—“

“It’s fine.”

They raised their heads at the same time. Will walked in the bedroom, his eyes red from crying and from him washing them with cold water.

“Mike caught us once,” Will added.

“Did he freak out?” Dustin asked.

Mike was about to reply, saying he had no reason to freak out since he was cool with people being gay, when Wilk talked, “Yeah. He ran out of the room. Didn’t speak with me for two weeks.”

Mike kept his mouth shut, realizing he wasn’t the problem in this scenario. Whoever the football player was – and God, Mike had seen him around, but couldn’t remember his name –, he was the actual asshole.

“He’s a dick,” Dustin stated, his eyes wandering to the TV screen where the film was now playing.

Will didn’t say anything. He just stepped closer to the bed and found a spot between Mike and Dustin to sit.

“What are we watching?” Will asked.

“Captain Fantastic,” Dustin said.

Will nodded.

In silence, the three watched the movie till the credits started rolling. Then, without a word, they simply fell back on the king-sized bed that Dustin Henderson owned and fell asleep.

party number eight: the punch

“It’s my birthday,” Eleven confessed, arms wrapped around Mike’s neck as they danced in the front yard of someone’s house.

It hadn’t been Mike’s idea to go out tonight (but then again, when was it?). It was April, he had a big test next week and two essays to write, but Lucas had found a new crush: this red-haired girl from his Maths class, and overhead her talking about this party, so he had to come, and that meant Mike had to be his wing-man. A forgotten wing-man since Lucas never stuck around, and Mike, since starting the game with Eleven, always went looking for her.

This time, he found her dancing in the living-room. It had taken her five seconds to see him, smile back and invite him for a dance.

They danced at the sound of Charli XCX’s song Boys, and, while Mike thought the song was ridiculous, Eleven danced around him, singing all the lyrics at the top of her lungs. It was funny to see her so relaxed. Tonight, she had his old jacket wrapped around her waist and her Minnie t-shirt. Mike almost felt bad for not choosing to wear his Mickey’s t-shirt, but Eleven’s smile made him forgot all about it.

A couple songs later, he got a glimpse of Lucas dancing with the red-haired he had a crush on. When he looked again, some time later, while Eleven was kneeing down in front of him tightening her right shoe’s laces, the couple was making out in the middle of the living-room. Mike was happy for his friend.

Suddenly, something soft, yet warm and icky found his hand. Fingers intertwined with his, and Mike found himself being pulled out of the living-room. He followed Eleven in a daze as she walked out of the house and stopped in the middle of the front yard. She wrapped her arms around him.

“It was hot inside,” she complained, moving her body closer to his.
“This is better.”

Mike blinked away his surprise and grinned, placing his hands carefully on her waist.

“This is much better,” he agreed.

They danced around even though they could barely hear the music from inside. There were practically alone in the garden – who cared about a few sleeping teenagers? -, smiling at each other like there was nobody else in the world.

For a second, Mike wondered if this was it; if this was the girl he was going to fall in love with for the first time in his life.

That's ridiculous, he thought. *We've met seven times*.

“It's my birthday,” Eleven confessed, a bit of shyness shining in her eyes as she looked away.

Mike tried to remember the date. April... April what?

“Happy Birthday,” he congratulated.

Eleven looked back at him, lips pressed in a smile.

“You don't have to.”

Mike frowned. “You wished me a happy birthday too,” he reminded her.

Eleven's smile grew softly.

“And you gave me a birthday present too,” Mike said, slowly leaning in, until Eleven tilted her head up and he captured her lips in a gentle

kiss.

It was soft because whenever they kissed, whenever they were nice to each other, everything turned soft. Her tongue was shy against his, his breathing raspy as he focused on her lips and only on her lips.

“Hey asshole!”

Eleven pulled back scared. Mike turned his head to see who had interrupted them, and suddenly something hard hit him on the face, the surprise of the impact throwing him to the floor.

“What the hell do you think you were doing?!” The guy yelled at him.

Mike was confused, one hand touching his nose as he felt blood dripping. The guy was tall, dark-haired, with large shoulders, and was wearing a fucking cap. At night. Who the fuck wore hats during the night?!

“Samuel, no!” Eleven shouted, pushing the boy away from Mike. “What’s wrong with you?”

“What’s wrong with me?” The guy shouted back. “I just saw some dude kissing my girlfriend.”

Suddenly, everything stopped for Mike.

Kissing my girlfriend.

He was kissing someone’s girlfriend?

What?

Everything went dizzy. Mike tried to understand what was happening. Had he forgotten Eleven had a boyfriend? But hadn’t they broken up? She had said something about that... hadn’t she?

No, she hadn’t. Suddenly, Mike remembered: he hadn’t even want to know the guy’s name. How could he have forgotten about it?

He felt bad. He suddenly felt really bad. Like his father. Or his

mother. Or both. Both were pieces of trash who cheated on each other constantly. He knew this because they threw the cheating at each other every time they fought.

Was Mike like his parents? But he promised himself never to become like them. Fuck, he was sixteen and already screwing up his promi-

“No! We’ve talked, Samuel!” Eleven exclaimed loudly enough that got Mike out of his dizzy thoughts. “I’m your girlfriend? No, I’m not! And why is that? Huh, Samuel? Why am I not your girlfriend anymore?”

“Ja-“

“NO!” Eleven shouted louder. “Because you thought you were my owner, and guess what? YOU ARE NOT! One month, Samuel. We dated for a month, and you managed to screw it all by manipulating everything I did! Jesus, I couldn’t even go out by myself, Samuel! And now look at you’ve done-” She pointed at Mike whose nose was bleeding and was staring at them, open-mouthed. –“He’s a good guy, and you don’t have the –“Eleven raised her hands up, shutting herself up. She tried to breath in, calming herself down, before saying, “You know what? I don’t owe you an explanation.”

Eleven marched up to where Mike was and helped him stand up. “Come on,” she muttered. “I’ll help you clean up.”

“Ja-“

“GO AWAY, SAMUEL,” Eleven shouted behind her shoulder right before walking inside the house.

She muttered a bunch of ‘excuse me’ on their way to the bathroom, a journey that took a while since neither knew where it was. When they finally got it, a couple was inside making out against the sink.

“Ugh, get out, please,” Eleven asked. “A guy is bleeding here!”

As soon as Eleven managed to close the door behind the couple, she started looking for a first-aid kit somewhere in the room. Mike sat still on top of the toilet’s lid, his head tilted back. He could feel the palm of one of his hands totally wet with blood. It was starting to get

icky, the blood drying against his skin.

“That guy had a great punch,” Mike commented.

Eleven groaned. “Really? That’s what you decided to say?”

Mike shrugged, his eyes looking at the white ceiling of the bathroom.

“As long as he really isn’t your boyfriend...”

“He isn’t.”

Mike heard something close. Eleven stood up and walked up to him. Something opened and then the tap was turned on, water running for a while.

Something wet came in touch with Mike’s face, right below his nose, and he winched.

“Sorry.” Eleven moved pieces of his hair from his forehead with no reason. “Samuel was a bit of a controller.”

“Why did you date him?”

“My mom liked him.”

Mike frowned, something that made his nose hurt and him flinching. Eleven caressed his cheek, soothing him.

“You only date people your mom likes?” Mike asked, confused.

There wasn’t a reply. Mike tried to take a look at Eleven, see if she was okay, but, before he did so, she confessed, “It’s the least I can do. We’re living through some rough times.”

“Oh,” Mike muttered, not knowing how to react. “So..., you don’t actually like the guys you date?”

Eleven took the cloth from Mike’s face and turned to the first-aid kit. “I like them. I don’t know. It’s complicated.” She came back with a bit of cotton in her hands and carefully put it inside Mike’s bleeding nostril. “There, that should do it. I don’t think your nose is broken.”

“I would know if it was,” Mike muttered and finally brought his head down to look at Eleven in the eyes. “So, what’s with the deal with you and your mom?”

Eleven blinked, surprised, and then chuckled, shaking her head, while going back to the first-aid kit to close it and put it back in its place.

“Maybe another time, Mickey.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Tell me what you think. If there are any scenarios that you would like seeing Mike and Eleven in, please tell me. Maybe I'll write it down.

5. Chapter 5

Notes for the Chapter:

Life has been crazy. Sorry.

I don't know when I'll be updating it again and I didn't have the time to proof-read it, so sorry for any mistakes.

I hope you enjoy it.

party number eight: the matching caps

It was Saturday and Mike had gone out by accident (if leaving the house to avoid an awkward family dinner could be named 'an accident'). And by accident he found Eleven, hanging out with a group of skaters in one of Hawkins many public parks. She had a stolen white cap on her head and, as soon as she saw Mike, she stole another cap – a black one with an eagle on it -, grabbed Mike's hand and ran from the group of skaters. She gave it to him as a present later, when they stopped running and were catching their breaths. Mike smiled and thanked her, but if anyone had asked him, he would say that the real present he got was to spend the night laying on a public park's fresh grass talking to Eleven about nothing and everything at the same time.

party number nine: the unconscious secrets

Mike had never been sure of his kissing skills. The few girls he had kissed before meeting Eleven hadn't ever given him a good practise since two of them had been pecks on the lips and the third one had a devil tongue and Mike had been quite frightened of trying to kiss back at some point.

Eleven was the first girl he actually had taken the time to learn how to kiss. But he had never known if he was doing the right thing or not, no matter how many times they had kiss in the few times they had met at parties.

Until Eleven, one warm night of April, turned to him in between kisses and said against his lips, “tell me something you don’t even want to admit to yourself.”

Mike pulled a bit back, surprised with her request. Eleven’s eyes were soft, probably still far from sobriety since they had smoked three joints together before coming to the bathroom to make out, and she kept gazing at his mouth like waiting for it to approach her again.

“Don’t you have anything?” She asked.

“I do,” Mike said, his fingers digging the soft skin of her tights. Her dress was so pulled back it was almost by her waist, and her legs were wrapped around his hips. “I’m scared.”

Eleven’s eyes turned to his.

“Of what?”

“Of my parents’ fights.”

Eleven didn’t know the story, but she didn’t have to. She touched his face gently, her finger a shadow against his skin. She moved it to his lips and caressed them before kissing him again.

“Your turn,” Mike asked against her lips.

Eleven’s eyebrows went up in surprise, as if she were not expecting him to ask something in return. Then, she looked away, shy for a second, and her arms tightened up around his neck, before she said, “You’re honestly – and I’m being really honest – the best kisser I’ve had the pleasure to kiss.”

party number ten: the nerd boyfriend

Mike was already at the party when she showed up, holding hands with a short guy, with blonde hair and buttoned-up white shirt. He wore round glasses and had a long nose. The way he looked at Eleven was like she was goddess given to him by accident.

Mike and Eleven crossed eyes a few times and bumped into each other twice. Neither said anything. It was like they were strangers.

party number eleven: Dustin's first kiss

Their eyes met in the middle of the crowded kitchen. Eleven was clearly going to say something, her red lips opening in a small 'o', but Mike turned his back and went to talk to Dustin before she could do anything.

"Dude, Jennifer Hayes is cute," Dustin confessed. He was drunk, probably for the first or second time in his life, and couldn't keep his mouth shut.

Mike snickered, his eyes laying on the petit blonde talking to a friend a few steps away from them.

"Do you want me to introduce you guys?"

Dustin's face went red.

"You can do that?"

Instead of saying something, Mike walked over to Jennifer, tapped her shoulder, and offered her the biggest and most genuine smile he had (never mind that he knew Eleven was watching), before talking to her about his friend, Dustin, and introduce them to each other.

By the end of the night, Jennifer Hayes realized that Dustin was clearly quite new at the flirting-game and decided to kiss him

halfway through a sentence right in front of everyone.

Mike didn't get to see Eleven again, nor her nerd boyfriend.

party number twelve: the warehouse party

School ended on a terribly hot day of June with most teenagers running out of the place as soon as the bell rang. Mike was standing by Lucas' old car – a black Jeep given to him by his parents after he had got his license, while his friend had to stay behind and talk to God-knows-who in the football team.

Mike was wondering where he could get a job for the summer in the town when he heard his name being called out.

Looking up, he found Will Byers and Dustin Henderson walking up to him. Will looked as shy as ever while Dustin had a goofy smile on his face.

“What’s up, Wheeler?” Dustin greeted. “What are you doing here? Is this your car?!”

Mike chuckled.

“No, man. It’s Lucas Sinclair’s car.”

“Lucas Sinclair?” Dustin frowned, looking at Will. “Do I know him?”

“We have American Literature with him, man,” Will replied, looking behind his shoulder. Why did he always look afraid that something was going jump him from behind at any second?

“Oh, yeah. The tall guy- Well, -“ Dustin looked Mike up and down. “You’re looking taller, Wheeler.”

“Thanks,” Mike replied, confused.

Finally, he saw Lucas leaving the school. Sadly, he wasn’t alone. *Still talking to them?*, Mike thought, upset. Why did Lucas want to join the

football team so badly?

As the three boys approached the car, Mike's eyes flickered to Will and Dustin, who had also noticed them, and saw Will freeze on the spot. Looking back at the football players, Mike recognized the guy he had caught Will with that one time at a party.

"Hey, man," Lucas greeted, eyeing Will and Dustin with a curious expression. "Hey Byers. And I don't know your name," he said, referring to Dustin.

"Dustin Henderson," Dustin said, yet there was no goofy smile on his mouth, nor a happy vibe. He had recognized the football player that kept breaking Will's heart too. "Nice to meet you." He turned to Will. "Let's go, man?"

Will just nodded, still eyeing the football player – god, what was his name?! – before following Dustin down the road to where the bus stop was.

"Anyway," Lucas started speaking after an awful silence spread for too long between the four of them, "Troy and Matthew here have invited us to a party, Mike."

Mike frowned, and the same expression showed up in the football players' face.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. Next Friday, isn't it?" He turned to the guy Will was secretly seeing.

"Yeah," the guy muttered. "Troy's idea."

If the other guy was Troy (and Mike was assuming he was Troy Harrington), then the guy Will was seeing was Matthew.

Matthew was a piece of shit, Mike concluded.

"Oh, cool. I have to check my agenda, but–"

"But we're going," Lucas interrupted happily, coming closer to Mike

to put an arm around his shoulders and squeezing him. “Right, Mike?”

“Right.”

Sometimes he was too much of a pushover.

The party wasn’t at anyone’s house this time, but in an abandoned warehouse near the old Hawkins National Laboratory that was shut in the eighties. People liked to tell tales about what happened in that Lab, spreading rumours about the workers and their doings in there. Mike had heard so many stories that he was sure he didn’t actually know the real one.

Troy Harrington drove them there. He said the party was off limits to many people, but they (that was, Mike and Lucas) were okay to go since they were with him and Matthew. Matthew was being very quiet, and Mike knew it was because of his presence thanks to all Troy’s complaints about his friend being too damn quiet tonight.

The warehouse was so full of coloured lights that it reminded Mike of Christmas and all the damn decorated houses in his neighbourhood. The music was so loud that as soon as he got out of the car he could hear Rihanna’s voice as clear as if he were standing next to the sound system.

“I hate this song,” Mike complained.

Troy Harrington looked at him like he was crazy. “Everyone loves ‘Work’, Wheeler. What’s wrong with you?”

“My taste in music, apparently,” Mike muttered after Troy walked away.

Lucas snickered and patted his friend’s back. “Come on. Let’s have some fun.”

Whenever Lucas – or anyone, really – told Mike those words, ‘Let’s have some fun’, he always knew something was going to go wrong. Or really, really great.

This time, he wasn’t sure how it went. At first, the party was just a wild, psychedelic adventure with rotating coloured lights that blinded you for a second before turning somewhere else. Parties in someone’s house is easy; you know there’s going to be a kitchen, a living-room, stairs, bathroom, you know the drill; but an abandoned warehouse? How does it work? Where do people go to pee?!

To make it all stranger, Last Christmas by Wham! started playing and everyone went crazy. Mike stopped still halfway to the made-up bar and looked behind his shoulder, staring at the people on the dance floor like they were maniac. Someone was playing Last Christmas to a bunch of drunk teenagers. In the summer. In a warehouse.

Shaking his head, Mike approached the bar. “Whiskey and cola, please,” he asked the bartender.

He waited a bit for his drink, checking the dance once or twice to see if he could find Lucas. Of course, he had already lost his best friend in the crowd. As soon as Lucas’ eyes laid on that red-haired he had a crush on, he was gone, and Mike was left all by himself. To be fair, Lucas did ask Mike first if he could go talk to the girl. Mike was the stupid one that said sure, go ahead.

The bartender showed up with the drink. “Here you go, man. It’s five bucks.”

Mike took out his wallet and paid the man.

“Thanks,” he said after and grabbed his drink. He went to find a nice spot where, at least, he wouldn’t get dry-humped by people.

He managed to find a few old couches, surprised that someone had the time and patience to bring those to that place just for a party, and sat down on an empty one. In the one next to him, there was a couple making out, the girl’s shirt was almost off, and the guy’s belt had been opened. Mike was sure he didn’t want to know the whereabouts of one of the girl’s hands, so he turned his face to the dancing crowd

and just watched them lose their mind to Katy Perry's I Kiss a Girl song.

He caught a glimpse of Lucas with the red-haired girl (what was her name? Michelle? No, that wasn't it... Max?), dancing really close to each other. Mike smiled, happy for his friend. At least, he wasn't trying to get into cheerleaders' pants.

Song after song, Mike kept watching people dancing, burying himself in the couch and getting comfortable. He finished his drink a while ago and dropped the plastic cup on the floor. He was feeling a good buzz from the drink, and all the lights were getting him all dizzy as well. It was like he was underwater, warm and... woozy.

His eyes were almost closing when suddenly a shadow opened space between the dancing bodies and walked in his direction. He started opening up his eyes again, staring at the trembling figure, until he gained focus again and saw Eleven, standing in front of him with two plastic cups, one hand stretched out in his direction. She had a tiny, insecure smile on her lips. That wasn't part of the game.

"Hey," she greeted after Mike took the drink.

"Hey," he said back and watched as she made way to the empty seat next to him. "What are you doing?"

Eleven threw her brown hair behind the shoulder (Mike noticed she was wearing a strapless, blue top tucked inside a black skirt) and said, "Well, I saw you all here by yourself with no drink, so... I decided to offer you one and some company."

Mike took a sip from his drink – whiskey and cola, he noticed – before saying, "Yeah? What does your boyfriend say about it?"

"I broke up with him."

Mike snorted. Of course, she did.

"Of course," he muttered. "And why? Wasn't he good enough?"

"He was too good, actually," Eleven confessed, turning her body in Mike's direction and dropping an arm over the couch's back.

Mike glanced at her with an eyebrow raised.

“Really,” she insisted, eyeing the inside of her cup. “He was nice and understanding, and...”

“Your mom liked him?”

“A lot,” Eleven said. She sighed. “That’s why I broke up with him.”

Mike frowned.

“I’m confused,” he replied.

Eleven’s lips upturned into a half-smile. “My mom loved him to death and she wanted my, well, dad, to meet him too. So, I broke up with him.”

“That’s... still confusing,” Mike said.

“What’s confusing?” Eleven asked, pulling her body closer to him. Mike could almost feel her body radiating warmth to him.

He cleared his throat before saying, “Well, you only date guys your mother likes, so I assume you introduce them right away.... If this one was so good that your mother loved and wanted your dad to meet, then... why break up with him? Isn’t that good?”

“No.” Eleven shook her head. “It’s really bad.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t want them happy,” Eleven answered. “I just want them... Well, *her*, satisfied.”

The way Eleven had talked made it look like it was obvious, but Mike still didn’t see it. He understood the part of keeping the parents satisfied – he did that as well; but why did she want that? Were her parents like his? Complete assholes? Did they fight a lot?

“Are they together?” Mike asked.

“No,” Eleven replied and took a long sip from her drink, almost

finishing it. Then, she cleaned her mouth with the back of her hand. “They broke up... like... one year ago? I was fourteen still, I think. Almost fifteen.”

“Why did they break up?”

The song changed. Instead of answering him, Eleven smiled, drank the rest of her cup and stood up, hand holding out for him to take.

“What?” Mike let out.

“Let’s have some fun,” Eleven remarked, calling him with her fingers.

Mike was frozen for a second, surprised, and yet not surprised, with the change of subject. He drank the rest of his drink in one go, cleaned his mouth with his hand, and then accepted Eleven’s offering, standing up and intertwining fingers with her.

They danced all night, although Mike was sure he wasn’t dancing, but rather swinging from one side to the other while Eleven truly enjoyed the music around him. and it was intense, how her eyes sometimes gazed into his, her teeth digging in her bottom lip, teasing him; how their lips would meet once in a while in quick touches, before Eleven turned around and kept dancing.

It was a game. They were still playing it. Mike just had to remember that.

6. Chapter 6

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry for any grammar mistakes.

Once again, I don't know when I'll be updating. Life's crazy. College kills me slowly.

party number thirteen: the bonfire

“I’m seeing Max,” Lucas announced in an extremely burning afternoon of July. They were at a beach, in a town near Hawkins, since where they lived had no sea, just boring lakes and a dangerous river where dead bodies had been found back in the eighties and nineties. Nowadays, there were signs everywhere to keep people away from the river.

“Like, officially,” Lucas added.

Mike tilted his head to right to look at his best friend. He had to close one eye since the sun was hitting him directly on the face (his mother was right, he should have brought a sunshade, or at least a hat to cover his face). “Really? When did that happen?”

“A few days ago. She asked me.”

Mike snorted.

“I’m too proud, okay?” Lucas reacted. “And I was going to. I... just didn’t know when.”

“Never, then,” Mike concluded.

Lucas had a very hard time talking about his own feelings and exposing his most vulnerable side. There was no doubt that he liked Max if he had accepted her request, but to make the first move, just like old, boring society expected him to do, was something that would never happen because Lucas just couldn’t deal with spoken

emotions.

“Why you gotta be like that?” Lucas complained, turning his body to lay on his stomach. He used his arms as a pillow for his head.

“What, realistic?”

“Fuck you.”

Mike chuckled. He looked away from his friend and closed his eyes, enjoying the hot, comfy sunlight warming his face. Wasn’t it just the best, to lay down on the sand and feel the sun hitting your skin like a nice blanket, keeping you warm and happy? Mike really liked the summer. At least, he had more free time, and free time meant no staying at home doing homework or studying, no curfew hour, no obligatory waking up hour, no family breakfast, no nothing. He was a free man during summer since his parents still had to work and barely had time to acknowledge what their three children were up to. Well, poor Holly, who was just barely six, had to be babysitted every day by the neighbours, but that was fine. Everyone loved little Holly with her blonde hair in two ponytails and a nice smile. And Nancy was already a grown woman who, only God knows why, still lived at home with her parents instead of-

You know what? Mike wasn’t even going to think about that again. Everything about his sister’s life pissed him off. He went back to think about summer.

If summer meant freedom, then it also meant more parties. Mike wasn’t sure if that was bad or good nowadays. Didn’t he like going to parties and coincidentally find Eleven there? Didn’t he like all the hours he spent talking to her, dancing with her, or simply... enjoying the same space in a nice silence? Well, he sure didn’t like when things went wrong, or he was left all by himself all night because Lucas was hooking up with who was now his official girlfriend and Eleven hadn’t showed up.

“There’s a bonfire tonight,” Lucas suddenly announced.

Mike looked over at him, seeing him checking his phone.

“Max told you about it?”

“No, Matthew.”

Mike made a sound and turned away, closing his eyes again.

“It’s near the river.”

“The river is dangerous.”

“Not all of it. There are safe places. Anyway, we are going.”

Mike sighed. He didn’t have the strength inside of him to fight Lucas about it, so he picked his own phone and asked Dustin (thank God Dustin loved to give his number to everyone he made acquaintances with) if he and Will were going to the bonfire. When he got a positive reply, he finally told Lucas, “Fine, we can go.”

There was a quiet moment.

“You’re not going to fight me on this? Wait, is this about the girl?”

“No,” Mike replied between teeth. “But Dustin said he and Will are going, so yeah.”

Lucas didn’t say anything at first. Mike heard him move around, and then a shadow came between him and the sun. Mike opened his eyes.

“Dude, since when do you like Henderson and Byers?” Lucas demanded to know.

“Since I found out they are cool people. What’s wrong with that, Lucas?”

Lucas stopped himself from saying the first thing that came to his mind and took his time to think.

“I just find it weird that you guys suddenly hang out.”

Well, they didn’t hang out. They barely saw each other, if Mike was totally honest, but he liked Dustin’s presence and Will... Well, he just felt like he had to protect Will from the world.

“Like I said, they are cool.”

Lucas had asked him if he wanted a ride to the bonfire with Harrington and Matthew, but Mike refused, saying he would go a bit later. He had been offered a seat in Will’s older brother car, so he had taken it before Lucas had said anything.

At least, you could have been honest, he told himself while hearing Dustin and Jonathan talking about photography and this weird-ass exhibition that was happening in a town somewhere near Hawkins.

“It’s about clowns! How weird and awesome is it?” Dustin said excitedly.

“Terribly bad,” Will muttered.

Mike looked over at him. Will had given his place in the front seat to Dustin.

“You don’t like clowns?”

“I read IT when I was a kid. Never again, man.” Will shook his head solemnly. Suddenly, he looked at Mike. “Well, don’t get me wrong: loved the book, but it scared me for life.”

Mike chuckled. “Got it.” Then he coughed, uncomfortable, as he remembered something. “Anyway, … Matthew is going to be there.”

Will half-smiled, looking ahead.

“I know. He texted me.” He glanced at Mike. His smile had turned sad. “He always texts me.”

“Is that what gives you hope?”

Will froze for a second before nodding.

“It’s... hard, you know? It’s like... a game.”

Mike blinked, his attention doubling now that Will had used the word ‘game’. It reminded him of Eleven.

“A game?”

“Yeah.” Will licked his lips, eyeing his brother and Dustin to make sure they weren’t listening, before he turned to Mike and added, “He likes to play me. It’s always when, how and where he wants... I never get to choose, but... it’s like I like it sometimes, you know? Wait around for him. I’m an idiot, I know I am. And... I’ve tried to forget him.”

Suddenly, the car came to a stop. Dustin and Jonathan’s conversation ended as Dustin turned around in his seat, smiling goofily at them, and said, “We’re here, people!”

“Will,” Jonathan called. “I’ll pick you up tomorrow at nine, okay?” After Will nodded, Jonathan turned to Dustin. “You take care of him, right?”

Dustin’s hand flew to his head. “Yes, sir.”

Will rolled his eyes and opened the car’s door. “Let’s go. Jeez.”

Jonathan had left them by the wood’s entrance and they still had to walk for a while to get to the bonfire. They simply followed the red light coming from between the trees and, as they got closer, they started hearing music and people chatting.

Dustin made it to the crowded place first, yelling greetings to anyone and getting high fives from people who, if sober, would never speak to him.

“I just love drunk people,” Dustin remarked, taking a deep, happy breath.

Next to him, Will rolled his eyes and Mike snickered.

“Let’s get some drinks?” He asked Will since he already knew that Dustin didn’t drink much and had decided to spend the night sober,

seeing how drunk the awful people from high school were going to get.

Will nodded and followed Mike all the way to a small wooden stand filled with drinks. The person serving them was a guy who clearly shouldn't be selling drinks to underage kids, but money was money, and kids drank a lot these days, right? (At least that was what the news said, and what Mike's mother had told him afterwards, asking him to watch out for any 'bad-influencing man' trying to sell him the wrong things).

"Whiskey and cola," Mike asked, rising two fingers. When he looked back at Will, he saw the boy staring at something. "What is —" Mike went quiet as he found Matthew in the crowd, making out with a girl.

"Asshole," he muttered.

"He's free to do whatever he wants," Will said.

The bartender came back with their drinks and Mike paid for them, promising Will he could get the next ones. Then, they went to find a nice spot to sit down, a nice piece of clean grass beneath a big tree, a few meters away from the bonfire and from eavesdroppers. People just loved to hear others' conversations.

"How did it start?" Mike asked, curious, and took a sip from his drink.

Will, who was holding his drink with both hands and had pulled his legs up, shrugged before saying, "It started when I lost my mind to the nice football player who saved me from this guy who was trying to put me inside my locker." Will's green eyes flickered to Mike. "I was fourteen at the time and Matthew was the first guy to ever smile at me in a way that... that made me want to lay awake night after night daydreaming about him. We met once in a while, said hi, studied together. All was fine, you know? We're friends. Until I got the balls to kiss him. He kissed me back and soon realized he could use me for whatever he wanted, because I was a goner. I was an idiot."

Will took the drink to his lips and drank it nonstop. Mike had to stop

him, pulling the plastic cup from his mouth.

“You’re not an idiot, Will. You’re just...”

“A piece of trash, Ted, that’s what you are!”

“Oh, thank God you’re still fucking married to me, Karen! Thank fucking God that you still want to fuck despite me being a piece of trash, right?!”

His mother had slapped his father after that. Mike had heard it, how her hand whipped his face and how he had screamed in pain and called her a bitch. Then, they fucked. Mike left the house through his bedroom window.

“I’m in love, is that what you’re going to say?” Will asked. “Because it’s true.”

People in love were weird. He didn’t want ever to be in love if that was what love made you do: act all crazy and fucked-up for one person.

“We all do crazy things for love,” Will added and finished his drink. “I never told him, though.”

Mike blinked, momentarily confused with the conversation. His mind kept going back to his parents’ fighting, calling each other’s nasty names before falling into each other’s arms, saying they loved each other.

“That I loved him,” Will explained. “Matthew has a lot of power over me, but... at least he doesn’t get the satisfaction of hearing me saying those words.”

Mike’s lips involuntarily jerked into a smile. “That’s good. Right?”

Will shrugged. “I don’t know.” He looked over at Mike. “I treat him like he treats me sometimes. Like... a game.”

It always went back to a game.

Were his parents playing a game as well?

“But games can be good,” Mike tried to believe.

Will shrugged. Clumsily, he stood up, while saying “I’m getting us another drink. Finish that up.”

Mike looked at his cup, which was practically full, and then watched Will walk up to the bartender and rise two fingers while speaking. Mike brought the drink to his lips and tried to drink it all.

He started coughing halfway when the harsh, burning taste of whiskey overcame the coke’s flavour. He used the back of his hand to clean his mouth and then threw the cup to a bush, refusing to drink the last drops.

“Not holding your liquor?”

Mike looked up and blinked in surprise.

But really, should he be that surprised that he bumped into Eleven?

“You’re into bonfires too?” He asked.

She smiled and crouched down in front of him. He noticed her clothes, like he always did, and smiled seeing his old jacket keeping her warm. Beneath it, she was wearing a yellow tissue-made jumpsuit shorts.

“It has booze. I like every place that has booze.”

“Well, then you’d love my house,” Mike said without thinking.

Eleven offered him a tense smile, knowing nothing good came from those words.

“I’m sorry it’s rough.”

“Oh, it’s-“

“Oh, hello,” Will greeted. He stopped still over the spot he had been sitting before and gave Mike his drink. “Who are you?” He asked Eleven.

Eleven stood up. "No one," she answered with a genuine smile. Then, she looked down at Mike, who had been staring at her shiny legs. Why were they shiny? "I'm leaving for the summer."

Mike's eyes went up to her face, wide-opened.

"W-what?"

"Family stuff," she said. "I'll see you in September, Mickey." With that, she walked away.

Will sat down next to Mike and sent him a confused glance.

"Did she just call you Mickey?"

But Mike didn't answer. He was too frozen, his eyes watching Eleven mingle with the drunk crowd before actually leaving his sight.

Now what would he do when Lucas forced him to go out to a party?

"Mike?" Will called.

He finally looked over at the smallest boy,

"Yeah?"

"Did she call you Mickey?"

The corner of Mike's lips upturned even though he felt devastated inside.

"It's also a game, Will. Maybe I'll tell you about it some other night."

The rest of Mike's summer went on to be completely dull when it came to his social outgoings and, well, matters of the heart. But at least he got himself busy by taking a job at Benny's diner washing dishes and occasionally waitering. It was tiring, and he made extra shifts whenever he could since it kept him from staying at home

hearing his parents' non-verbal and most of the times verbal fighting. The best part, though, was that it gave him the perfect excuse not to go to parties. He couldn't just go get drunk when he had to be up in the next morning to work for six hours, could he now? And Lucas, who was usually the one that begged him to go with him, accepted his arguments right away. He also had Max to keep him company.

Dustin and Will spent a lot of their time at the diner, sharing a few words with Mike whenever he passed by their table. When possible, they waited for him to finish his shift and Dustin drove him home.

At some point of the summer, Mike stopped to think about what was happening. How did he get to be friends with Dustin Henderson and Will Byers? And why were they so cool and open with him when Mike was clearly a closed kind of person? They barely knew stuff about Mike, while Will always confided in him things about Matthew and Dustin liked to rant about whatever was happening in his life with no problems.

Didn't they find it odd that Mike barely talked about his life? And Will had never once asked about Eleven again. It was like he had forgotten the weird girl that had called Mike Mickey.

"It's my birthday next week," Lucas stated out of nowhere.

Mike looked up from the magazine he had been reading. They were in the shopping centre, both having been dragged by Lucas' girlfriend to it, and after three hours of walking in and out of shops, they had called it quits and sat down in the food court.

"I know it is," Mike said. "I've bought you a gift."

Lucas' eyes perked up.

"You have?"

Mike frowned, turning the page. "Yeah. Why are you acting like that?"

There was a pause that made Mike look up again.

"Well, I thought you're slowly trying to replace me with Henderson

and Byers,” Lucas confessed.

Mike snorted.

“Right.”

“I mean it.”

Mike stared at him, eyebrows puckered together in shock.

“Why would you think that?”

“We barely hang out and-“

“That’s because I’m working, and you have a girlfriend. Dustin and Will spend a lot of their time at the diner, that’s why I see them more often than I see you,” Mike interrupted, explain himself. “That does not mean I’m replacing you. I would never do that.”

Lucas could be a pain in the ass sometimes, but weren’t all friends just that at some point? It didn’t mean Mike wanted to get rid of him; quite the opposite, actually, since Lucas always made Mike see things in a more rational perspective. He knew he got too invested most of the time, whether was it in his own feelings and shit, or in a stupid game he decided to play with a random girl he only met at parties. But Lucas was a very balanced guy, even for a sixteen-year-old whose biggest dreams were to join the football team and get his driving license, and he usually told Mike when he was getting too deep in stupid things.

“So, you want to come to my house and have some dinner on my birthday?” Lucas finally asked.

Mike put down the magazine. “Is your mom cooking?”

“No, my sister Erica is.”

Mike nodded. “So, … we’re eating French toast with smiley faces?”

“And gummy bears,” Lucas replied with a solemn expression.

“Sounds delicious.”

“It is.”

They stared at each other for a few seconds before bursting into laughter.

Notes for the Chapter:

Kudos & Comments make my day, guys.

Hope you enjoyed this chapter.

7. Chapter 7

Notes for the Chapter:

Hey everyone.

First of all, I want to apologize for not replying to your comments. Life has been crazy and has now become crazier since I started my internship.

Second of all, I'm sorry I'm posting after such a long time. I warned you guys that I wouldn't be able to update frequently. I cannot tell you when I'm doing it next since life's REALLY crazy and I'm tired. I need to adjust to the working hours.

Third of all, enjoy this chapter.

party number fourteen: the long-time-no-see

School started in early September and, of course, someone had to throw a goodbye-summer party in the weekend before they had to go back. Lucas texted Mike about it at the same time that Will sent him a message asking if he was going to Matthew's party.

Mike [14:55]: you are going?

Will[15:01]: yeah...

Will [15:02]: he begged me, you see...

Mike typed out an angry reply – *what the fuck, will?* – but regretted it before sending, so he erased it and rewrote a new one, saying he would be at the party. Everyone was. Why should he be the town's loner? Plus, he had some money (a lot, actually, but he didn't want to brag) saved that he could spend on booze without a worry. The extra shifts at Benny's had really helped him raise a nice quantity of money and save it for emergencies. Or for a car. His parents were now pushing him into getting his driving license, so on Mondays,

Wednesdays and Fridays you'd find Mike Wheeler at Hawkins best driving school, hearing about traffic signs and basic rules of safe driving.

Lucas picked Mike up around ten pm. For the first time in, what?, months, he told his mother he was going out and then sleeping at Lucas' place. He'd probably come home straight from the party at six am, but his mother didn't need to know that.

"Where's Max?" Mike asked.

"Family dinner with fun games and shit. She hates it, but her father made her stay at home." Lucas shrugged, trying to make it sound like an average thing, but Mike could read his face as he could understand his own handwriting in a bad day, so he knew his friend was actually afraid of something.

"Family dinners happen a lot in her house?"

"When her brother comes home from college, yeah." Lucas' voice almost sounded threatening.

"Is something wrong with Max's brother?"

"No." Lucas licked his lips. "Actually, everything. He's a jackass."

Mike nodded, understanding. He knew a lot of people who were complete jackasses.

The party wasn't at Matthew's house, Mike soon found out, as Lucas parked his car nearby the old abandoned warehouse.

"How the fuck did-"

"His brother is, like, a really important person in some business," Lucas explained, waving his hand in the air like he didn't understand it as well. "Anyway, we have cheap booze and an awesome DJ playing, so let's just go and have some fun, dude."

Have some fun, that was what all people his age ever wanted.

Mike got out of the car, waited for Lucas to lock it, and walked in the

warehouse's direction. A lot of cars were already parked outside, and the psychedelic coloured-lights were already bursting through the cracked windows of the warehouse. Whoever was playing music was putting out a song in a foreign language. As Mike walked inside the warehouse, having his hand stamped with a red weird bird-shape, he tried to listen carefully to the lyrics, trying to get the singer's native tongue.

“Wait, what’s this?” He asked Lucas.

“It’s Brazilian,” a familiar voice answered instead of Lucas.

Mike turned around fast, having known who that voice belonged to. His eyes met Eleven’s – her big, brown eyes were sparkling in their special mischievous way -, she smiled at him and then disappeared into the crowd.

“Wait, isn’t that-“

“Yeah,” Mike said before Lucas could finish his question. It was Eleven. He had barely got a good look at her before she was gone.

But, at least, she was here tonight. And that meant he would eventually find her.

“Dude, what’s with the weird smile?” Lucas asked.

Mike just kept smiling. Eleven came back from her vacation. They could return to their little game. They could kiss again. Find new things about each other. God, he could look at her again instead of daydreaming about her... Wait, was he being weird? Jesus, maybe he was turning into a sociopath.

Eventually, Lucas pulled him to the bar and paid for their first drinks while Mike scanned the dance floor for any sign of Eleven. He hadn’t even noticed what she was wearing, or how her hair was done.

“Here, drink,” Lucas gave one of the shots to Mike. “Cheers.”

“Cheers,” Mike repeated, eyes on the crowd. He drank the shot fast. The burning, disgusting taste of whiskey burnt all the way down his throat, catching him by surprise.

“Pure whiskey?!” He managed to yell after he almost spit the drink on the floor. “What’s wrong with you, Lucas?”

“What? We need to get drunk fast. Two more, please,” he said to the bartender.

“No!” Mike exclaimed. The bartender stopped, confused. “Give us two beers, please. Jesus, Lucas,” he turned to his friend. “Take it easy, for fucking sakes. We have got all night.”

“Yeah, but for the most of it I want to be drunk, not in process of getting drunk,” Luca complained. “Why you want to take it easy?”

Mike didn’t answer. Instead, he grabbed the drinks from the bartender and gave one to Lucas. It was obvious, wasn’t it? He didn’t want to be shit-faced when he found Eleven again. He hadn’t seen her in two months and, honestly, he missed their random encounters and their stupid no-name game. He had so much he wanted to talk to her, and if he drank too much, he would never get the questions coherently out of his mouth.

Halfway through his third beer, Mike went to the bathroom. He drank the rest of it as he avoided dancing bodies and shouting drunks, throwing the bottle in an already too full trash bin before entering the bathroom. The place was all painted in the most random kind of drawings and words, and it looked like no one had cleaned it up in months. Mike couldn’t even begin to describe the awful smell of piss and vomit in it.

He made his way to one of the bathroom stalls, leaving the door open behind him. He was getting too drunk, and that hadn’t been his plan. He barely drunk for the past two months and his body had got used to sobriety. Now, three beers and one shot of whiskey was enough to make Mike feel dizzy; fuck, he even heard dizzy.

After he was done, he walked up to the lavatory. He was carefully washing his hands when the bathroom door opened, and Will walked in, followed by Matthew.

“Hello Miikee!” Will almost sang, walking up to him and giving him a hug from behind. “I missed you!”

Mike's gaze met Matthew's in the mirror while he answered Will, "Missed you too, man. You good?"

"Yeah, I'm great," Will replied, pulling away. He looked at Matthew. "I threw up, so Matthew here is going to help me clean myself up!"

"That's nice of him," Mike said, closing the faucet. He shook his hands, small drops of water hitting the bathroom's dirty mirror, before rubbing them against his jeans. "Well, if you need anything, just give me a call, yeah?"

Will nodded with a bright smile.

When Mike passed by Matthew, he muttered, "Better watch out, man."

Matthew didn't react at all. Right after he left the bathroom, Mike heard Will laughing.

I need a drink, he thought, so he made his way to the bar.

He moved past two guys who had just got their drinks and reached the bar's counter.

"Well, well, well."

Mike looked at his right.

"Eleven," he whispered.

The girl smiled up at him, body leaning closer to him as she said, "I've been watching you."

Mike's eyes widened. "Really?"

"Yeah," Eleven nodded. She turned to the bartender and accepted the drink he brought her. "How much?"

"I'll pay," Mike offered, grabbing his wallet. "Can I have another beer, please?"

The bartender nodded and walked away. When he came back, Mike

gave him ten bucks.

“So, how is your night going?” Mike asked while waiting for his change.

Eleven shrugged, taking her drink to her lips.

“Not as fun as I wanted it to be.”

Mike frowned. “Oh? How come?” The bartender came back with the change and gave it to him. “Thanks, man.”

He turned back to Eleven again.

“So?”

“So, it’s not fun.”

Mike pressed his lips together.

“Can I do anything to change your mind about it?” He asked. To be honest, Mike wasn’t feeling as happy as he could be feeling at a party. Yeah, he was more drunk than expected, but still... Something had been missing. Deep down, he knew it had been Eleven’s presence.

Eleven’s lips upturned in what could be a sad smile. If she had any sad smiles.

“Keep me company, Mickey Mouse?”

“Always, Eleven.”

They found a nice spot outside the warehouse to sit on: a huge truck-tire laying on the grass, against one of the warehouse’s sides. They managed to find a comfortable position, their bodies’ sides completely touching from shoulders to feet.

“So...” Mike started.

“So...” Eleven repeated, giving him one of her typical I-know-what-you-want stares.

“How was the summer?”

She made a face and took a long sip from her drink.

“A mess, but everything’s fine now.”

“It is?”

Mike had no idea that things had been so complicated. But, well, he barely knew stuff about Eleven, so what could he expect? Everything was a possibility with her; everything she could tell him was something new, something to cherish.

“Yeah...” Eleven licked her lips, thoughtful. Then, she shook her head, almost like saying ‘fuck it’, and drank the rest of her drink. She threw the cup as far she could. It landed somewhere on the dry, dirty grass. “My parents finally signed the divorce papers.”

“Oh.”

“It felt... good,” Eleven continued. She looked over at Mike. “They are free now. That’s what divorce is, isn’t it? To be free from the person you once loved. If you ever loved them.”

Mike shrugged, pretending he didn’t know the answer. He actually had thought about it, especially during his parents’ verbal fights. Did they ever love each other? Mike was sure of that. After all, they did have three kids together, and they were still together... Were they fighting to keep the marriage alive as well? Or were they just being jackasses? Maybe, just maybe, hurting each other was the way they loved one another.

But his parents weren’t Eleven’s parents. And he should be focusing on that now. She was opening up to him, after all.

“Do you think that they never loved each other?” Mike asked.

Eleven sighed.

“I don’t know. Do you think love comes as easy as the marriage rate in the country shows? Shit, how many people have found the one, then?”

“Not many. Have you seen the divorce rate?” Mike replied.

Eleven cracked a smile.

Mike checked his drink’s taste. Noticing it was too warm, he threw it away, the bottle ending up near Eleven’s cup.

“So, who are you going to live with?” Mike asked.

Eleven shook her head, chuckling softly.

“That’s another completely different story.”

Mike frowned. “How come?”

Eleven didn’t answer at first. She got lost in thoughts, her eyes gazing at nowhere. Suddenly, she woke herself up, looked up at Mike and gave him one of her mischievous smiles. She sat up straighter and then moved her body over Mike’s, straddling him.

“That’s a story for another time,” she stated before her mouth found his.

And that was how they spent the night, kissing each other, marking each other’s skin, whispering nonsense between kisses and giggling like two little kids hiding a secret from the world.

party number fifteen: the good girl

His sister came home crying. His mother tried to calm her down, worried about her baby girl; her sweet, sweet Nancy. She asked her over and over who had harm her; if they needed to call the cops; *please, Nancy, talk to me!*, his mother begged. And finally, Nancy talked. Steve broke up with her. Out of the blue. No good reason given.

After finding out that the reason Nancy was crying was that her rich

boyfriend had ended things with her, Ted Wheeler freaked out and, in between shouts, he called his older daughter a whore since she couldn't even keep a nice man between her legs. Karen slapped him, started a fight with him, and both completely forgot about crying Nancy whose heart broke just a little bit more after her father's words. Mike tried to soothe her, but he wasn't sure what to say (congrats on fucking up a future wealthy marriage? I'm sorry he broke your heart? There's plenty of fish in the sea?), ending up patting her on the back.

Mike packed a small backpack and left his house for a few days – no one would notice his absence; no one ever did – and went to stay at Dustin's place. The Henderson's household was small when compared to the Wheeler's: it was just Dustin, his mother and a cat called Mews. Dustin's mother had no problem in having a friend of her son staying there for a while; she didn't even need an explanation.

"She's used to have Will around here," Dustin explained later, in his bedroom, while crouching in front of his TV to put on a film. "He stays here a lot of nights."

"Why?" Mike asked, sitting on the left side of the bed. Dustin had made it very clear that the right one was his side.

Dustin stood up and walked over to the bed. "Well, Matthew usually calls him when least expected. He goes there, tells his mom he's staying at my place. He ends up staying here since Matthew screws up and Will doesn't want to show up at home crying."

"Doesn't his mother know he's gay?"

"Well, yeah." Dustin jumped on the bed and made himself comfortable. "But he doesn't want her to know he's fucking in love with an asshole. And, since he lies about where he's staying, he can't really show up at home, can he? Then, he'd have to come up with a lie that involved me and him fighting. Anyway, can we watch Star Wars or what?"

"Press play, man," Mike said, waving his hand to the TV.

But he didn't pay much attention to the film's beginning, his mind

still wrapped up in the conversation about Will. It was all fucked up, wasn't it? Will's case, his parents', now Nancy... Did everyone that tried love get fucked up afterwards? Shouldn't there be a book about it? *Don't try love, it's going to fuck you up?* Maybe Mike should write it, show the world that there was no need to go out and try to find love.

Funny enough, his mind wandered to Eleven.

No, that's not the same... That's not love.

It was a game. Just a stupid game between two teenagers.

Mike's phone suddenly buzzed.

Lucas [22:21]: Harrington's throwing a party on Saturday. You in? Dustin and Will can come too, he said.

Mike looked over at Dustin whose sparkling eyes were staring at the TV in fascination. It was like he was watching the film for the first time – something that Mike knew was incorrect since Dustin even knew how to impersonate Chewbacca's voice.

“Dude, party on Saturday, you in?” He asked. “Will’s invited too.”

“Where is it?”

“Harrington’s.”

Dustin’s eyes went wide-opened.

“Troy Harrington’s freaking mansion? I’m so in.”

Mike typed down an answer to Lucas, saying that he and Dustin were in, he just had to check with Will. He didn’t actually have to check with Will; if Matthew was going to be there – and he was because it was his best friend’s party -, then of course Will would go.

It was only after Mike pressed send that he remembered Nancy. Nancy used to date Troy’s older brother, Steve. And now Mike was going to that dude’s house? Wasn’t it some sort of betrayal to his sister?

Wait, no. What was he thinking? Of course, it wasn't. Mike had already gone to Troy Harrington's parties. And he wasn't going there for Steve Harrington. Fuck, he wasn't even going for the place the party was. He was just using the place as a way to find Eleven again. Because party meant Eleven. And he wanted to see her. For the sake of the little game they were playing, and for no other reason-

Fuck, he missed her. Three weeks without seeing her and he missed her.

"Dude, Leia and Han are, like, relationship goals," Dustin suddenly said. Then, his face went red. "I never said that, okay?"

Mike frowned, confused. "Sure."

The party was lame. Troy was yelling at everyone for some unknown reason, Dustin had drunk way too much for his own good – he was now making out with one of the cheerleaders - , and Lucas and Max were having a fight somewhere in the mansion's back yard. At least, a while ago, when Mike tried to go there for some quietness, he found them screaming at each other.

Every fucking couple he knew was broken. Why did they go after love? Jesus, they were all dumbasses.

At least, Mike was safe. He was all good with his little game with Eleven and drinking his ass off.

Speaking of drinking, he needed a beer.

He made his way to the kitchen, pushing back drunk people who didn't know how to walk a straight line. He stopped still halfway to the table where the drinks were.

Steve Harrington was also at the party, he noticed, giving out free booze to anyone that showed up in the kitchen. When he saw Mike, the guy offered him a fucking bottle of gin, and told him to have the

greatest night. He was clearly trying to keep Mike away from him; or drunk enough that he wouldn't be able to avenge his sister.

But why would he avenge his sister? She was the one that gave up her big dreams for a douchebag.

Well, maybe Steve wasn't a douchebag.

Maybe he was.

Or maybe-

Mike was too drunk to get the answer himself, so he decided to go back to the kitchen and ask Steve himself.

“Why did you break up with her?”

Steve's face turned into a grimace of pain before he pulled Mike from the drunk crowd and took him to a corner.

“I fell out of love, okay?” Steve confessed.

Mike made a face as if he were confused.

“Shit happens, Wheeler,” Steve continued, looking at the teenagers around them. “People don't get to be in love forever. I loved your sister a lot, but-” He licked his lips nervously. “It... just wasn't enough, okay? Sometimes love just isn't enough.”

Mike suddenly smiled. He pressed a finger against Steve's chest and said, “Love never is enough, man. Love is just fucking.... pain.”

“Mike-“

Mike shook his head, gave the bottle of gin back, and walked away.

Fucking people and their fucking emotions.

He was almost out of the mansion when the front door opened and a girl in a classy, white dress, with white stockings, brown hair pulled up in a fancy hairdo, and a face of angel walked in. He looked her up and down a dozen times before she stopped right in front of him with

her innocent smile, batting her big, brown eyes at him.

“Hi Mickey.”

“Eleven,” he whispered. “Why are you dressed like that?”

She looked own at her dress before facing him again. “I’m a good girl. Just like my Mama wants me to be.”

Mike blinked repeatedly, feeling confused.

What was happening?

Eleven touched his chest with both hands and raised herself to her the tip of her toes, so she could get to his ear and whisper, “I’m a good girl who wants to be bad, Mickey. Can you help me be bad?”

Mike gulped.

“H-how?” He asked.

She tilted her head, facing him. Her innocent smile was gone and the typical mischievous that followed her everywhere was back. She leaned up and kissed him passionately.

Mike’s hands grabbed her waist, pulled her closer, as his tongue found its way into her mouth and she moaned. She fucking moaned. Mike breathed through his nostrils, fingers digging in her soft dress, his mouth tasting her like it was the last time they would ever get to kiss.

Then, Eleven pulled back.

“Next time, Mickey,” she said.

“Next time, what?” Mike asked, confused.

“Next time, we’re going to belong to each other,” she promised.

8. Not a chapter

Hey everyone.

Just to let you know that my laptop crashed and I've lost all my folders in it. I cannot promise to update soon as I don't have a laptop right now and no back-up place where I left this fic's chapters safe. I'll have to rewrite the chapters I already had and then find the energy to keep writing more. It has been a crazy week.

Thank you all for your great, lovely reviews. They mean the world to me.

Love, Dee

9. Chapter 9

Notes for the Chapter:

I'M BACK!

Thank God that my laptop didn't completely fry and I managed to finally get some things back, including the chapters I had already written for this story!!

My life has been crazy. I'm doing my internship, so it keeps me EXTRA busy. But as soon as I got these files back, I needed to post this chapter because you guys are so amazing! I decided not to delete the 'not-chapter' because some of you showed some support about this terrible incident - thankfully it's sort of over! -that I didn't have the guts to delete it like I said I was going to.

I didn't have the time to proof-read it carefully. I'm SO HAPPY to have these things back.

I hope you guys enjoy this chapter.

party number sixteen: the stupid boy

Christmas was right around the corner, and that could only mean one thing to Mike: his seventeenth birthday was almost here. His fucking birthday, which he had to celebrate on New Year's Eve, was arriving, and his parents were too busy spoiling heart-broken Nancy to even fucking notice little Holly, let alone remember their son's birthday.

Was it selfish that he felt angry whenever he saw his parents – well, his mother mostly – giving sweet Nancy everything she wanted (and sometimes it got out of hand because she spent days without leaving her bed and demanding that everything was delivered there) while neglecting their other kids? Did they even notice what they were doing?

“She’s in pain,” Will defended, head bowed over his Maths homework. “You have to be more sensitive about it.”

“Well, but... it has been months since they broke up.”

“They dated for years, Mike,” Will replied, finally looking up with a judgmental expression. “Be more sensitive. She’s your sister.”

Yeah, a sister who kept demanding a lot of shit from everyone, including Mike, and he couldn’t deal with it anymore. Fuck, she had even asked him to stay with her after dinner watching silly Lifetime movies instead of letting him go out. Mike just wanted a party. He wanted to see Eleven. He hadn’t seen her in months because he barely went out. He went to a party, what, three, four times? And he never saw her. It was ridiculous. His parents barely paid him attention, but his older sister did, and, for some unknown, stupid reason, she wanted to spend time with him.

“Holly wants to watch cartoons,” Mike told Nancy after his younger sister had come to his bedroom and whispered in his ear that she wanted to watch Disney channel, but Nancy was crying over some stupid film.

Nancy looked up from where she was laying on the couch. Her eyes were red, and she was holding a used tissue in one of her hands.

“It’s a sad film, Mike. They don’t end up together.”

Mike looked at the TV and sighed, recognizing the film as one of those that Nancy kept re-watching. She did it to make herself hurt more because the couple didn’t end up together, just like Steve and she didn’t.

“But Holly-“

“Michael,” Karen’s voice cut him off.

He sighed, exasperated, and turned around to the living-room’s entrance.

“Let your sister watch her film,” she demanded.

“But Holly-“

“No. Holly can go play with her toys.” Karen looked at her younger daughter, who had hidden herself behind her brother’s legs. “Right?”

Holly nodded quietly and walked out of the living-room, going upstairs to her bedroom, where she kept all her toys.

Mike felt injustice for his younger sister. Okay, yes, Nancy was in pain, and she had every single right to be like that. But life didn’t stop because Nancy was feeling down. Holly needed to do her own thing as well, and watching freaking Disney Channel was part of it. So, why couldn’t she? Why did the Wheeler’s household stop because of Nancy? What if it was Mike? Would everything stop for him as well? Or for Holly?

“You’re thinking too much,” Nancy’s voice echoed to his ears.

Mike made a face at her before walking out of the living-room, making a loud noise as he walked up the stairs.

Hell. He was living in a fucking hell.

Mike left his house two hours before midnight. He did not want to spend the first minutes of the New Year with his family, so he called up Dustin whose mother had a bunch of friends over, and they decided to go out. Someone somewhere was throwing a party. At least, that was what Lucas’ message said. All Mike did was follow his instructions and he ended up in front of a house going wild, with teenagers dancing around on the grass, and music blasting from inside the place.

He had no idea who lived here, but he pitied the parents. He always pitied the parents.

“This is insane, man,” Dustin remarked as he watched two girls making out in front of a guy. A few steps away from them, there was

a couple clearly dry-humping in front of everyone. “Do people lose their shit on the last day of the year to go out in a bang or to start the new year with a wild night?”

“Both,” Mike answered, getting two beers from the fridge. Thank God there were still drinks around, or he would have lost it.

He needed to get shit-faced.

Eleven wasn’t even in his mind tonight – maybe for the five seconds that he was now using to think of her. It was his birthday, his seventeenth birthday, and all he had got was a small chocolate cake with his name writing on it with white cream and one gift. From all the fucking family in the house (and there were a lot of fucking rich uncles and aunts with them this holiday), he had only got one gift: a fucking new jacket. Because he had lost one last winter, his mother had said after he opened the gift. The damn jacket that Eleven had kept.

Mike drunk the first beer in one go, and then tried to find something better; whisky, gin, vodka, something that could make him lose his sobriety fast and enjoy the goddamn awful music that was playing. Why, but why did people keep playing Christmas songs? Wasn’t Christmas like one week ago?

Lucky for him, Mike found half bottle of whisky laying on the floor. He grabbed it, hid it inside his jacket and, with a pat on Dustin’s back, he quickly left the kitchen and made his way to the first floor. He just needed a quiet place to drink and spend the last hour of his birthday.

He found a spare room; probably a guest’s bedroom by the way it was decorated. Mike walked up to the window, checked the backyard of the place through it, and then sat on the windowsill. He opened the bottle of whisky, counted to three – he knew the taste would be awful – and took a long sip from it.

He coughed for a few seconds, disgusted with the burning taste, but soon found himself drinking again. And again, and again, until the awful taste of the whisky felt like nothing and his head was submersed into dizziness and random thoughts.

He wondered where Dustin was. Then, he asked himself why Lucas hadn't come out. Of course, he quickly remembered that his friend had taken Max to his house to introduce her to his family. How disgustingly sweet was that? They were so freaking in love that-

No. He was not going to think about love because, if he did, he would get angry and think about his sister. His stupid older sister who had given everything up for a first, high school love. Stupid. Stupid.

His parents were stupid too.

Was he stupid? Did stupidity run in the family?

Poor Holly, then.

Mike chuckled, finding his own thoughts funny. Funny and sad.

He felt sad.

We only lived once, right? That was what everyone was now tattooing and using online with hashtags. And it was fucked up, to have just one tiny life to live, and most of it you spend fucking it up.

Mike feared death. He feared each year passing by and the fact that tomorrow wouldn't just be a new day, it would also be one day closer to his death. And what was he doing? Drinking alone in someone's bedroom on his birthday? If life was like this when he was seventeen, how would it be like in ten years? Twenty? Where was he going with his life?

The room's door suddenly opened. Mike looked up, eyes watching as someone made their way into the bedroom and closed the door slowly behind them. He smiled as Eleven approached the window's light and he could see her from head to toes.

"Hi," he said and offered the bottle of whiskey. He finally noticed it was empty. "Oh, sorry," he muttered, putting the bottle down.

Eleven sat down in front of him on the windowsill. She was wearing one of those fancy good-girl dresses. You know, those dresses that you only see good girls in films wearing them. Eleven's dress was white with a big orange ribbon belt.

“Why you dress like that?”

“My mom likes it.”

“You do everything your mom likes?”

Eleven didn’t say anything, instead stared at him so intently that it reminded Mike of his teachers trying to understand if he was paying attention or not in class.

“I know it’s your birthday,” she said.

“You know what that means?” Mike asked.

Eleven blinked, a small smile showing up. “What?”

“That it’s fucking New Year’s Eve.”

10

They looked outside the window. The countdown had begun. What an ironic moment.

9

8

Eleven turned back to Mike.

“Happy Birthday, Mickey,” she wished and leaned forward to kiss him on the lips.

6

5

3

“Why?”

Why was she here? Why was his first day as a seventeen-year-old such bullshit?

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

People were cheering and someone lighted up fireworks. Their explosions brightened up the sky as if there was daylight. Mike stared at the show, quite fascinated. He remembered how his father used to lighten up fireworks in their backyard when he was a kid. He and Nancy used to be best buddies back then, squealing at the coloured-lights in the sky that made a lot of noise.

“Why?”

Mike looked back at Eleven.

“Why what?” He asked, confused.

“That was your last word of the year, Mickey,” Eleven pointed out.

Mike chuckled.

“You think I feel bad about it?”

Eleven shrugged.

“At least, my last word was a cute one.”

Mike blinked, confused.

Mickey. That had been her last word.

Mike laughed, shaking his head. He leaned back on the window’s frame and sighed. Outside, the fireworks stopped. He felt sad.

“And I’m sorry.”

Mike glanced at Eleven.

“Sorry for what?”

Eleven bit her bottom lip, chewing it nervously, before saying, “I promised you something the last time we were together that I cannot fulfil...”

Mike frowned, confused.

He tried to remember what it was.

Should he remember it?

“I... I don’t know what it was,” he confessed.

Eleven smiled, relieved.

“It wasn’t important.”

“Promises are important,” Mike replied.

She raised an eyebrow.

“Oh yeah?”

Mike nodded.

At least, he believed they were. His older sister - some part of him scowled inside just with the thought of Nancy – used to tell him that promises were a big deal; people were made of promises, that was why when he promised her something, he had to oblige to it, and vice-versa.

Suddenly, Mike remembered Eleven’s promise. He blinked a lot of times, while she watched him carefully, knowing he was realizing something.

“Oh, I know... what the promise was.” Mike coughed. “It’s fine.”

Even though he wanted to know how they would belong to each other. Had she been talking about sex? Mike had never done it. After all, he had only kissed four girls in his entire life. Where would he have found the time to have sex?

“Are you a virgin?” Eleven asked out of the blue.

Mike coughed and nodded.

“You?”

“Sort of.”

Mike raised an eyebrow.

“I tried to do it with an ex,” Eleven explained. “But... he barely put it in before I decided I didn’t want to.” She looked away, almost as if she was embarrassed. “Does it count?”

Mike didn’t know what to say at first. How should he feel about that new Eleven-fact? Should he feel jealous that she trusted someone else, and not him? Wait. Why would she want to do it with him? Who was he in her life, if a Mickey, someone she randomly met up at parties?

Abruptly, the reality of their situation came to Mike: they had known each other for over a year now. They had shared secrets, kisses, long talks. They had to be someone in each other’s lives, didn’t they?

“I guess... it only counts if you want to,” Mike ended up saying.

That must have been the right thing because Eleven smiled brightly at him, in a silent thank-you.

Lucas came to Mike’s house one afternoon in cold January, asking him for love advice.

Mike stared at him like he was crazy, but let his friend speak before attacking him with harsh comments.

“It’s her older brother, you know?” Luca confessed. He looked pale, like he wasn’t supposed to say that, but oh well, he said it anyway. “He hates me... because I’m black, and... he saw us a while ago and keeps harassing her. What am I supposed to do?”

Mike blinked, remaining quiet.

“I mean, I can’t and don’t want to change who I am. And aren’t we

living in the twenty-first century? Shouldn't I get to be with who I want without fucking racists coming after us?" Lucas spitted out.

Mike decided to stand up, walk up to his fridge, and grab two of his father's beers. He offered one to Lucas.

"Thanks," the dark-skinned boy thanked quietly.

Mike sat down next to him again. They opened their beer cans at the same time and took a long sip together.

After cleaning his lips to the back of his hand, Mike decided to say, "I'm shitty at love advice, man. And I don't even see what there's to be done. If the guy's a racist--"

"Max gets distant sometimes because of him," Lucas explained. "It's like... she's scared that he'll hurt me, so she pushes me back. But... I love her. I'm not going to give this up without a fight, you know? That's not what you do when you love someone."

Mike stayed quiet.

Was that the reason why his parents hadn't got a divorce yet? Was that why Nancy kept crying and waiting for a phone call from Steve? Was that why Will kept letting himself be played by Matthew?

Was that why he felt the need to see Eleven all the time?

Love?

What was love?

The doorbell rang. Mike sighed, left his friend and his beer in the kitchen, and walked up to the door.

On the other side of it, there was a teenager girl holding Holly in her arms. Mike blinked, confused.

"Hi, Mike."

Mike opened his mouth to say hi back, but he realized he wasn't sure who she was.

The girl noticed his hesitation and said, “I’m Holly’s babysitter, Michelle?”

“Oh...”

“We go to school together,” she added.

Mike felt like shit.

Funnily enough, the girl giggled at his facial expression, the laugh leaving a trail of a smile on her lips. Mike noticed she had dimples when she smiled.

“Your mom asked me to take care of Holly until five, but... it’s almost six and she didn’t show up, so I decided to come and drop her.”

Mike tried to keep a straight-faced appearance. His mom was probably somewhere cheating on her husband.

“Thank you,” he said and stretched his arms out to grab Holly. His sister giggled as soon as she felt his arms around her tiny waist. Mike looked back at the babysitter. “Look, hum, Michelle?”

The girl nodded.

“I don’t have any money with me and-“

“Oh, it’s fine,” Michelle interrupted friendly. “I’m sure Mrs. Wheeler will pay me back next time she asks me to babysit little Holly.”

Mike wasn’t sure what to say, so he settled for “Good, that’s good,” and stared at her in an awkward silence.

He noticed how straight her black hair was, how pale – just like him – she was, and how long her neck was. Now that he had taken a proper look at her, he was sure he had seen her around school.

“Well, I have to go now,” the girl finally talked, feeling the awkwardness heating up the silence too much. “I’ll see you around, Mike?”

“Yeah, see you, Michelle.”

The girl smiled softly at him before walking away. Holly squirmed in his arms and he let her go to the floor. Soon, her steps echoed as she made her way to the living-room. By the street, Holly's babysitter looked back at him one last time.

Mike went back to the kitchen, where he had left Lucas by himself. His friend had already drunk all his beer and had grabbed Mike's.

“Sorry,” Lucas apologized, being caught with his mouth on the beer can.

Mike shrugged.

“It's fine.”

“Who was at the door?”

“Holly's babysitter came to drop her off. My mom was late to pick her up.”

Lucas made a surprised face, but soon moved on from the subject.
“What do you think I should do? About Max.”

“Talk to her,” Mike replied.

Wasn't communication the basis of a relationship or something?

“I try to-“

Mike sighed, exasperate. “Try harder. Dude, listen, I don't know, okay? I really don't know. I want to help you, but I can't. I'm shitty at relationships.”

It was something that ran in the family.

party number seventeen: valentine's day

Nancy went on a date with someone. She was finally looking alive,

talking less about Steve, crying less and watching less depressing films. Holly could finally watch her Disney Channel TV shows and Mike could be in peace. His parents were back at giving each other all the attention in the world, fighting over everything and making small cold stares contests over dinner.

Yet, Valentine's Day changed their dynamic. For a day, they acted like they were in love, kissing each other over breakfast, holding hands, saying they loved each other.

Mike and Nancy shared a look over their cups of warm milk, both knowing this was all an act. And, if it wasn't, then their parents were more fucked up than they assumed.

Mike hadn't anything planned for the day, so he decided to join Dustin at a café near the high school. Lucas was going on a special date with Max – of course -, while Will... Well...

"Matthew asked him to go to his place since his parents are going to be out all day," Dustin told Mike as he moved around the pool table, trying to pick a ball to play. Finally, he leaned over the table and positioned his cue. Mike noticed he was trying to get a red ball into the hole.

"I worry about him," Mike confessed.

Dustin glanced at him.

"Yeah, man. I do too. But he knows what he is doing."

"It doesn't look like it."

Dustin pressed his lips together, like he didn't know what to say or think.

"We'll be there if he doesn't."

Mike didn't seem so sure about that. How could anyone help someone get over a broken heart? They couldn't fix it for Will. they weren't inside his mind, they didn't know what his thoughts were... At any moment, he would be reminded of Matthew and neither Mike nor Dustin could change the fact that he would be in pain.

“You can’t fix someone else’s pain for them,” Mike replied.

Dustin looked up from the pool table, looking surprised.

“What book did you get that one from?” He joked.

Mike rolled his eyes.

“I came up with it.”

“You should be on deepquotes.com or something, man,” Dustin kept going, walking around the pool table, looking for another ball to shoot.

Mike leaned against a pole behind him, holding his cue close. Dustin was clearly winning the game, more interested and motivated in it than him. Mike just wanted a distraction, but a real distraction, something that could really take his mind off things. Playing pool wasn’t working. The background noise of the café wasn’t working. The drinks they had ordered – just a couple of non-alcoholic beers – weren’t working.

His mind kept going back to his parents’ behaviour that morning; to his sister’s suddenly livelihood; to Eleven.

He hadn’t seen her since his birthday. He wondered how she was doing. Was she still partying like crazy? Was she meeting up with other Mickeys as he stayed home studying? Did she get a new boyfriend? Did she have sex with-

Stop it, Mike demanded to himself. He was overthinking. He had no rights in Eleven’s life, so he shouldn’t even be asking those kinds of questions in his mind.

He had his own thing going on.

Wait, what? What thing?

“Hey, man. It’s your turn,” Dustin called.

Mike blinked, raising his head slowly. In that precise moment, the café’s door opened, grabbing his attention. His eyes widened as he

saw Eleven, walking into the coffee shop, all smiles and... sparkling. She was sparkling.

“Man, are you-“

“Wait here,” Mike begged quickly, giving Dustin his cue and walking up to where Eleven was now standing at the counter.

“One coke, please.”

“Make that two,” Mike said.

Eleven turned. Her big, brown eyes brightened up as she saw him standing there, right next to her.

“Mickey Mouse,” she greeted. “Long time no see.”

“Hey Eleven. How is it going?”

The girl shrugged, like nothing interesting had happened in her life in the last few weeks. She accepted the drink from the bartender, just like Mike did, and they both paid their share.

“What are you doing in a café on Valentine’s Day?” She asked, curious.

Mike chuckled.

“I could ask you the same.” Mike glanced at Dustin, who got himself entertained by checking his phone. “I’m here with a friend.”

Eleven raised an eyebrow, checking the café for a familiar face. She knew Lucas and Will, but Mike was sure she had never seen him with Dustin. Or had she?

“That boy there with the phone?”

“How do you know?”

“I remember his face from somewhere,” Eleven replied and took a sip from her coke. “So, no girlfriend for the holiday? Really?”

Mike blinked, confused, as the sentence *why would I get a girlfriend*

when I go you? got stuck in his throat. Because he couldn't say that; he couldn't even think that.

This was just a game.

Even though he didn't say anything, his face did. Eleven took one look at him and shook her head, knowing what he had thought.

"I'm not girlfriend material, Mickey."

"Then, why do you keep getting boyfriends?"

"I've told you that."

Mike suddenly felt angry.

How could she give him a bullshit excuse so bluntly? She wasn't girlfriend material? Then, what the fuck was he? He had never been in a relationship, had no idea if he even wanted one, unlike her who kept showing up with random guys and calling them boyfriends.

Maybe, just maybe, he was the one that wasn't boyfriend material, and Eleven knew that. One look at him and anyone could see how fucked up he was; how shitty he was.

It was in the genes, he supposed. Fucking up love.

"Gotta get back to my friend," Mike excused himself and walked away from her.

As soon as he stopped next to Dustin, the boy looked up from his phone and asked, "Who's the girl?"

"No one."

Notes for the Chapter:

Kudos & Comments make my DAY.

10. Chapter 10

Notes for the Chapter:

Surprise, everyone. I've updated.

I'm pretty sure no one is ready for this chapter. But I hope you guys like it anyway.

It's short and I'm sorry. I don't know when I'll be updating again since I haven't found the time to finish the next chapter.

party number eighteen: the girl

“Don’t you have plans today?” He asked her.

As soon as the question was made, she walked out of her bedroom, going straight into the small cabin’s living-room which blended with the kitchen halfway through the space.

She took a long look at him. He was wearing his sheriff uniform, holding his big, brown hat on one hand, looking at her with some concern and doubt. He didn’t know what to do with her. She was new. Just like the letter that had come in the mail that morning. The letter that gave her a new name.

“I don’t know yet,” she answered. She was still in her pyjamas, some old clothes that once belonged to him. She knew he felt proud when he first saw her wearing them, even if it were just as some pyjamas.

“You don’t have a... well, boyfriend?” He cringed at the last word, not sure how to react about it. He wasn’t sure of his role in her life. Not yet.

“No,” She replied, moving to the kitchen area. She wanted to eat some eggos, but was sure he hadn’t bought any new boxes. Sometimes he would forget she was here because he wasn’t used to her.

Yet, to her surprise, two unopened boxes were laying on one of the fridge's shelves. She smiled to herself, deep down thinking *he's starting to care*, and grabbed one.

"Well, I'm off to work... Behave yourself?"

"Sure thing."

The cabin's door opened and closed. Meanwhile, she prepared her breakfast calmly as someone who had all the time in the world. Because she did. Her History teacher would come by around four pm, and then at six pm the Math teacher would give her a small quiz. It was all written down on the black board that hung next to the fridge, her daily reminder that she was now home-schooled because she chose to be.

But it really hadn't been her choice, had it? It wasn't her choice that her official father said he refused to let her go to a public school and mingle with poor and middle-class kids, or that her mother had come up with the idea of home-schooling. All she did was agreeing to it.

Finding a nice spot on the old sofa, she turned the TV on and spent the first hour of her day watching some old soap opera and eating eggos. She really didn't have any plans. Not until the weekend, at least, when her mother would show up and take her out to this fancy, for-rich-people-only club so that she could meet more people. That is, young men suitable for her. Or whatever that meant.

They tried to communicate through her taste in men, she supposed. Her mother had had terrible taste in them-

No.

We are not doing this again, Jane, the voice of her therapist said in her head. *We do not push people down for things they aren't guilty of.*

Eventually, Jane stood up, put the dirty plate in the sink and walked to her bedroom to change clothes.

She went out for a walk. The cabin she now lived was a bit far from town, but she didn't mind walking there. It took her half an hour (forty-five minutes if she was feeling like walking slow) to get to

Hawkins' downtown. She wondered where to go first.

Hawkins was a small town, therefore there wasn't much to see or do, but she quite enjoyed it. People sometimes gave her funny looks, but that was because they didn't know who she was, and, in such a small town, they were meant to know her. Did she go to school with their kids? Who were her parents? What was her name? Who was she?

Who am I?

She stopped in front of a shop window, not noticing the mannequins' clothes or any movement inside the shop. She just stared at herself in the mirror. She had picked old clothes – a big shirt that probably belonged to one of her ex-boyfriends and a pair of black jeans. Her hair was done in a messy hair-bun. Her face was paler and drier than the usual.

“Hi,” she said to herself. “Hi Jane Hopper.”

Jane Hopper was now her name. The letter that came in the mail that morning finally officialised her request. Her mother would probably cry some more crocodile tears when-

No. no crocodile tears. Her mother was not that guilty.

But she lied. She lied for so many years about who Jane was, about who Jane's father was...

Jim Hopper.

A long time ago – around seventeen years -, Terry Ives had an affair. She cheated on her beloved fiancé, Martin Brenner, with a guy. A guy who had no idea who she was. Jim Hopper had just gone out for a drink that night and had met her. He had met sweet Terry Ives who had had a fight with her boyfriend and told him they were over. The two slept together. Two days later, her “ex-boyfriend” called her, and she ran back to his arms.

“Hey, I know you.”

Jane blinked and turned around.

She came face to face with a sweet boy; someone her age, with a bowl haircut, light eyes, shy smile. She knew who he was to.

She knew he hung out with Mickey.

“You’re a friend of Mickey,” she stated, making it clear that she did not call Mickey by his real name.

The boy frowned, confused, but nodded, going along.

“Yes. I’m Will.”

Jane smiled.

“Nice to meet you, Will. My name is Eleven.”

Will didn’t buy it, but smiled politely at her. The smile didn’t quite reach his eyes, and that was when she noticed he was sad. He was really sad.

“Are you okay?” She asked.

Will pressed his lips together, clearly trying to control himself. His eyes were a bit red. Tears wanted to fall.

“It’s complicated. You- You wouldn’t want to know,” he said back in a tiny voice.

Jane felt sorry, truly sorry for him, and for a second, she wanted to know his problems. But she didn’t say anything, just nodded, let him say goodbye and watched him walk away.

He was too close to Mickey. She couldn’t get mingle in Mickey’s life. She already liked him too much.

But could you blame her? Mickey was nice. He was so nice and- Well, he wasn’t nice the last time they met. That was, what?, on Valentine’s Day. Yeah, totally on Valentine’s Day. She had looked for him after that day at parties, but she never found him. It made her sad. Mickey was a rock in her life. He made her feel sane. She wasn’t Jane Ives, or Jane Brenner, or Jane Hopper, or any kind of Jane when she was with him; she was Eleven. She had made up the name on the spot. It

had been the first thing that came to her mind, and she quite liked it now. Secretly liked it. Mickey was the only person that called her Eleven.

Her phone buzzed. She shoved her hand in the back pocket of her black jeans and grabbed her phone. Someone had texted her something about a party on Friday. The text made her smile. Since the first party she had gone to in Hawkins that she kept giving her number to people so that she could always know when there was a party happening. She literally said it to them when she first gave them her number. “Text me only to tell me when there are parties, okay?” And everyone agreed. They were lovely people. People who sought attention in her, in the wrong places.

And now, she had somewhere to go on Friday night. She was sure that Hopper was working late. He usually did on Fridays. A lot of people got into trouble on that night (she could imagine why).

Deep down, she hoped she would get to see Mickey at the party.

Jane got dressed slowly. First, right before dinner, she put on black tights. Then, Hopper called her, so she just dressed her pyjama pants again and joined him for dinner. They ate a pizza together and, for dessert, there was some chocolate.

“I have to go back to the station,” he told her in a very monotonic tone of voice, which meant he wasn’t pleased to go back to work and leave her all by herself. “Please, behave tonight?”

She nodded. “Sure thing, dear uncle.”

Jim sighed, like he was ten-times more tired than he actually was, and stood up, grabbing their plates. He took them to the small sink in the kitchen area.

“Please, get home safe,” he added.

He always knew when she went out. She didn't hide it from him and he didn't stop her. It was quite good to find out that your biological dad wasn't the one you thought it was. Jim Hopper was still getting used to her and didn't quite see her as his daughter yet. That meant, he just worried about her like she was... a niece. That was why she sometimes liked to call him 'uncle'. They didn't have a father-daughter relationship. Not like she used to have with Brenner, when she thought he was her real father.

After he left, she went back to getting dressed.

She was halfway through zipping this black, tight dress when her phone rang. The annoying ringing told her it was her mother calling. Her sweet, sweet mother who had lied to her for basically all her life.

"Hey Mama," she greeted coldly.

"Jane, sweetie, don't start like that." Her mother sighed exasperated. "I just want to have a chat with you. My sister is going to pick you up tomorrow, okay? After lunch."

"Yes, I know."

Her mother didn't know how to drive. She had never got her driver's license, having pretty much always depended on her boyfriend's – later on, husband and then ex-husband – ride. Now, she asked her younger sister for rides, for any kind of favours, really, and paid her back with some money. The divorce's consequences were revealing to be pretty good for her, and not so much for Martin Brenner. But he couldn't complain. He still got the three cars and dozens of bank accounts bursting with money.

"I have to go now, Mama," Jane suddenly said. She wanted to put her shoes on, grab a coat and leave the house. Fast. The party was one hour away from her place and someone offered her a ride that she had to take at ten pm sharp or she would walk. "See you tomorrow. Bye."

"By-"

She hung up.

Grabbing all the things she needed – not including money or wallet because why on earth would she need those things? -, Jane left the cabin and walked fast to the road. There, she waited for about ten minutes until a red car pulled over and she got in.

“Thanks for the ride.”

The guy smiled at her. She had hooked up with him once or twice. He was a football player in Hawkins High School.

Mickey went to that school too.

Fuck, stop.

She had to stop thinking about him at such random moments. Or, at least, she should talk to her therapist about him. The therapist that her once-biological father was paying for her since, according to him, she was a very traumatized young girl.

Yeah, finding out at the age of fourteen that your father wasn’t your father and your mother lied to everyone for years could be quite traumatizing.

They arrived at the party fast. The guy smiled cheekily at her, waiting for some kind of recognition, but she muttered some quick thanks and got out of the car before he could grab her. Just because they had hooked up before didn’t mean she was in the mood for it tonight.

She didn’t know whose place this was, she realized, as she walked into the house. There was music playing, people talking loudly, couples making out. Jeez, it was only ten pm and people were already trashed.

Jane made her way to the kitchen. Some guys tried to say hi, some girls checked her out – either out of envy or attraction -, but she didn’t pay them attention. She wanted something to drink, and then, if possible, she would like to meet Mickey.

She should have brought his jacket, the one she had kept by accident the first night they met. God, that night had been awful. It had been one of the first times she had ever gone out at night, and someone

gave her too much to drink. The friends that had joined her that night had pretty much abandoned her until it was time to go home. She hadn't spoken to them since then.

Jane grabbed a beer from the fridge and walked back to the hall. She looked around for a second. There was a long corridor that took her to the back of the house, so she followed it. Doors to bedrooms were open and there was a line next to a dark red door. Probably the bathroom.

The backdoor – one of those fancy sliding doors – was open and so she made her way to the backyard where there was less people and less noise. Some guys were playing with a blue balloon, having the time of their lives, like that was the funniest thing ever, while some girls were dancing, even though you could barely hear the music from inside.

She found a nice spot by a tree, leaned against it and kept a curious eye on the drunk teenagers. She liked to analyse people's behaviours, especially when they were drunk. There was a... freedom to being drunk. An amazing, careless feeling grew inside of you with each sip of an alcoholic drink. Jane liked it. She liked it too much, according to her therapist (the woman cringed every time Jane talked about how drunk she got at parties. It was clear she wanted to tell on her, but legally she couldn't. So, she was stuck in giving Jane the same advices over and over again). But the woman wasn't that bad. Her therapist was quite a nice lady, who, from day one, went along with Jane's belief that nothing was wrong.

So what she had ran away from her house?

So what she had taken a two-hour trip to a small town she had never visited just to have a chance of meeting her real father? Didn't she have some kind of right to do it? Why had it been such a crazy decision?

Adults could be complicated. Jane hated complicated. Life could be simpler if people didn't lie, didn't hide, and didn't love. Really. A perfect world. Some kind of shit taken from a Black Mirror episode, though, but who cared?

Finally, as a bright light that could blind Jane if she wasn't too mesmerized by it, Mickey showed up. She watched him walk out of the house through the same sliding door she had used. She watched him pat the shoulder of the quiet, small boy she had met the other day (Will, right?), almost like he was comforting him. The boy still looked sad. So sad.

But Jane, selfish Jane, focused on Mickey.

Mickey was tall and lanky, and, a long time ago, she would probably think 'what a geek', but now, now she saw his prettiness. He was really pretty, in a way that most girls and boys wished they were. He had a sharp jawline, his cheeks were adorned with beautiful, dusty freckles, and his big, brown eyes were always so... so happy to see her. Like, no one else ever felt that happy with seeing her. Not her mother, not her once-biological father, not her real father, not her tutors, no one.

Some nights, Jane believed she could die in that boy's arms. Other nights, she reminded herself that love wasn't real, and Mickey was just a game. A silly game.

She was about to drop her beer on the floor and move closer to them – maybe start with a quirky remark or maybe with a simple 'hello', waiting for Mickey to widen his eyes and smile brightly at her - when something made her stop. A girl. A girl walked up to Mickey and wrapped her arm around his, pulling him closer to her. Mickey looked embarrassed for a second, then he leaned down and kissed her on the lips.

He kissed the girl.

She blinked many times, confused.

Was Mickey ... dating someone?

But how did that happen? She was so sure he was into her, into their silly game... When did he find the time to fall for someone else? To look at another girl and think she was interesting enough to date?

Did Jane do something wrong?

No, it couldn't be...

Mickey was just like other teenage boys. If Jane wasn't giving him what he wanted, he had to go and find it somewhere else.

Either way, it didn't matter to her. They were just a game.

(Someday, she would get the guts to admit out loud that it was in that moment that she felt her heart break into a million pieces for the first time.)

Notes for the Chapter:

Tell me what you think.

Love, Dee.

11. Chapter 11

Notes for the Chapter:

I don't have time. I honestly don't. Life has been so... ugh. I'm pretty sure I'm cursed, but whatever.

Here's the tenth chapter. I'm sorry if there are mistakes - once again, I didn't have time to proofread it. I barely had time to write it. I finished this chapter just a couple minutes ago. I'm trying to start the next one. My life is going to be like this until June.

To anyone who's still out there waiting for my updates, thank you so much. I adore you, guys. I'm sorry I can't update more often.

party number nineteen: the unlovable boy

Will knocked on the basement door, letting him know he had arrived. When Mike opened the door, it took him one second to see his friend had been crying. Again.

“Sorry,” Will muttered while Mike let him in with a quiet shake of the head.

It was fine. Mike was here for him, just like Dustin was. They were friends.

Will sat down on the sofa like a dead weight falling with the extra help of gravity. He left his backpack on the floor next to his feet. Mike joined him on the sofa.

There was quietness for some time. Mike wasn't sure what to say to Will. Not anymore. It had been one month... One month since...

Matthew was in a happy relationship with someone else; with this

girl from the decathlon team, really nice, really smart, and really pretty. Will had nothing against her, and that made him sadder, made the whole broken-heart-situation harder to deal with, because he couldn't just say she was a bitch or a slut or anything. He couldn't call her bad names because, first, it was wrong, and two, it wasn't true. She was nice. She was a person. And she made Matthew happy.

"How's Michelle?" Will asked in a weak voice, in a vain attempt to avoid talking about his trip to the Wheeler's basement. The reasons and feelings that made him cry out of the blue every time he thought of Mathew and his nice girlfriend.

Mike coughed, embarrassed as he always felt whenever someone brought up his girlfriend.

"She's good," he answered.

Michelle had just...been there. Mike didn't have deep feelings for her, neither had she for him, which made whatever they had perfect. After his mother forgot to pick up Holly from the babysitter again, Mike was the one that once more opened the door for Michelle. And the question – would you like to have dinner at Benny's? – fell out of his mouth before he could understand what was happening. She said yes.

It had been weird, going on a date with Michelle. But, minute by minute, their awkwardness had started to vanish and they found somehow what could be comfort in each other's presences. It was easy being with Michelle because he didn't feel like he had to do anything to amaze her. Not like he felt in Eleven's presence.

Speaking of Eleven, he hadn't seen her in weeks. Now that he had a girlfriend, he rarely went out, not missing at all the craziness that was high school parties. Missing Eleven... well, now that was a different story. A story he tried to ignore.

He had seen her around town. Sometimes she would show up in the same place he was having a date with Michelle. Sometimes he would meet her in the grocery shop, she wandering around and he being forced to help his mother with the shopping. They never greeted each other. One look and that was it. That was how they acknowledged

each other.

Michelle didn't know about Eleven. If she had noticed how he would stare at the strange girl that popped out in a random diner they were having dinner, she hadn't said anything yet. Maybe she understood. That was why it was easy being with her.

"It hurts," Will finally admitted. That was how he always started to confess what was happening inside his head. It hurt. It sucked.

"I know," Mike replied, stroking the boy's back.

"He... He i-is happy," Will struggled to say, his voice cracking. "I shouldn't hate it... I—" he looked up at Mike with teary, puffy eyes—"if I really loved him, I should be happy, right?"

Love was so fucked-up that it fucked you up. It made you think that you should be happy for someone else when you loved them and wanted them to be with you. In no freaking way, it could be possible to feel actual joy from seeing the person you love loving another.

But Mike couldn't be cynical about love right now. It would only hurt Will more, make him feel silly.

"You can't put your feelings under his. You have to matter more to yourself than him, Will," Mike said, to which Will sighed, defeated. "He... he's just someone. Someone who doesn't deserve you, or your love. You have to forget him."

Will's teary eyes sharpened as he turned his head to look straight at Mike. He looked older, with his brownish, wet eyes now angry and his mouth pressed into a thin line.

"You don't get it," he accused Mike. "You don't get anything about love." Will suddenly moved away from Mike and hid his face behind his hands. When he spoke, his voice came out muffled. "Why do I keep trying to talk to you? You don't get it. Fuck, Mike. What's wrong with you? Telling me to forget him? Do you think it's easy?" He put his hands down and looked at Mike once again. "He doesn't deserve me? What if I'm the one who doesn't deserve him? What if I'm the asshole and he's the good guy who is living his life? Eh? What

if I was the one that pushed too much? Don't you think about that?"

Mike stared at him, confused.

"Life isn't made of people who are right and people who are wrong," Will continued, tears falling down his face. "So, can you fucking stop believing you're one of those people who are right? You're not always right, Mike. Look at you."

Look at you.

Mike looked down at himself, at the person he was at the young age of seventeen. He was who he was thanks to whom? To himself? To his parents? To his older sister's example? To school? To friends? To Eleven?

Look at him. Look at Michael Wheeler go. The only son of Karen and Ted Wheeler. The younger brother of Nancy "Perfect Girl" Wheeler. The nerd boy. The smart guy. The one that would write your reports in exchange for drinks or money. The unpopular friend of Lucas Sinclair. Eleven's little game.

Who was he? Who was he to judge?

Look at you.

"Sorry," Will suddenly said, sounding defeated. "I'm sorry. I- I shouldn't have."

"It's fine," Mike muttered. He was right. "It's fine," he repeated.

"Do you... Do you want to smoke a joint?" Will offered.

Mike glanced at him, noticing how Will was staring at him in a frightened quietness, expecting a harsh answer from him.

But who was he to do so?

"Sure," Mike agreed.

Mike didn't know it then, but that would be the night he would get hooked on soft drugs.

Michelle wanted to go out. Mike was surprised when, on one of her dates to Beny's diner, she proposed the idea naturally, like going out to high school parties was something they usually did as a couple. But it wasn't. They were rarely seen together, preferring to spend their time alone in late afternoons and in places people usually didn't go to. Parties were a place everyone went to and Mike didn't want to go. Plus, he had other plans, to stay in with Dustin and Will and hide in the basement to smoke and drink.

"Why?" Mike asked, confused.

"My friends are going, Mike," Michelle answered, lips pouting. "I want to have some fun and I want my boyfriend there as well. Why don't you ever want to go out?"

Mike stared at her with no answer.

He had an answer. He just didn't want his girlfriend to know it.

"Fine. Let's go out."

At least, he was pretty sure Lucas would be going. And it would be easy to convince Dustin to go as well. When it came to Will, well, ... he would go if the rest agreed to. Hopefully – but not likely to happen –, Matthew and his two-month relationship wouldn't be attending that party.

Sometimes, Mike wondered how his life got to this point; the point where going to a simple party was a big deal because he could find *her*. And then, he would think: how ridiculous was it, to give someone so much importance when, in return, they could care less?

"You're a pushover," Dustin had accused him once in a playful tone. He had been trying to make a joke, saying something that was untrue, but, in reality, it was damn accurate. Mike was a pushover. He let everyone walk over him and accepted everyone's decisions instead of making his own.

That was why he was going to the party. That was why, when he saw Eleven, he would freeze and let her decide how their night would play out.

“Hey, listen,” Michelle suddenly said, her small hand covering his over the table. “If you don’t want to go, it’s fine,” she added with a small smile.

Mike stared at her, blinked a few times in confusion. Michelle was clearly putting her wants aside and giving Mike the time to escape, to go have his night in with Dustin and Will and smoke pot, but, now,... now that he had the option? He didn’t want to.

“I’ll go,” he confirmed.

He wasn’t a pushover; he was just an idiot.

And thanks to being an idiot, he found himself in someone’s house, walking into a party that should have been stopped by the cops a few hours ago, greeting people he wasn’t sure he knew and trying to find somewhere quiet to smoke a joint with Will and Dustin. Michelle wouldn’t make him stay with her all night. She had just wanted to walk into a party hand in hand with her boyfriend.

The basement was empty, which surprised the three boys. They found comfortable seats, Mike sent Lucas a text telling him where he was, and soon a joint was lighted. Will always called ‘shotgun’ to smoking first since he was the one that had always to roll the joints. Mike’s part was to give money and Dustin’s was to smoke for free.

“It smells like weed in here,” Lucas said as soon as he hit the last step of the stairs. He made a face, noticing the joint being passed from Will to Mike. “You guys are smoking again?”

“It’s relaxing,” Dustin informed while Will smiled playfully and Mike stayed quiet.

Lucas was against any kind of drugs, except alcohol. He liked to forget that alcohol was a drug too.

“Where’s Max?” Mike asked, trying to take his friend’s mind away from that subject.

“Upstairs, dancing.” Lucas paused, glancing at Mike. “We’ve met your friend.”

Mike’s heart stopped for a second, but he gave nothing away and asked, “What friend?”

“Don’t play dumb.”

Mike knew Lucas was expecting a reaction from him; maybe get up and go find her; maybe blush and say something incoherently. But Mike stayed strong, staring at him like he had no idea who he was talking about.

“Fine, be like that,” Lucas said and turned around, leaving.

“Who was he talking about?” Dustin asked, confused.

Will looked at Mike knowingly. Mike just ignored him and stood up, muttering something about going to the bathroom. If it was a lie, only Will noticed it. Dustin was too baffled and high to understand anything.

Mike didn’t go look for her. Truly, he went to the bathroom, getting lost in the way as he had no idea where it was, but then, when he finally got to the line that lead to the bathroom, everything stopped and he cursed himself at the same time something inside of him sang in joy. There was Eleven, standing in line, a bottle of vodka in her hand and a crooked smile. Her eyes met his as soon as he stopped right behind her in the line.

They stared at each other until, at last, Eleven raised the bottle and offered it to him. Mike took it and, while he drank, the line moved and they followed it.

They didn’t speak. They just glanced at each other in turns and shared a bottle of vodka until it was finally Eleven’s time to go to the bathroom. She casted a glance at him – a small pause with the door half-opened – before her face was gone and there was a white door between them.

It was like time stopped and moved forwards too fast at the same time. Mike had a million questions in his head: what to do next?

What not do? Say something? Keep quiet? Why?

Why?

The door opened again. Eleven made a move to get out of the bathroom, but something inside of Mike clicked. He pushed her inside again, closing the door behind them. Some drunk guy yelled, “Don’t you dare fuck in there. I gotta take a piss!”

It was quiet.

It didn’t matter that music was blasting from the living-room and echoing throughout the entire house. It didn’t matter that there was a line of frustrated drunks wanting to take a leak behind the door. It didn’t matter that Mike was supposed to be back in the basement while Eleven-

“What are you doing here?” He asked.

Eleven blinked.

“Is that the question you really want to ask me?”

Mike licked his lips, noticing how her eyes followed his movement.

“Who are you with tonight?”

Eleven’s lips curled into a ghostly smile before they were pressed together.

“No one.”

“I don’t believe it,” Mike said.

“Why?” She asked defiantly. “Do you think I’m like you?”

He frowned, confused; yet, he knew she was being quite direct with what she wanted to say. She hadn’t been the one that ended the game by getting into a relationship. She hadn’t been the one showing up to a party holding someone else’s hand.

“It shouldn’t matter,” Mike said out loud. “What I decide to do. You

don't have a saying in it," he explained.

Eleven's eyebrow raised quickly in surprise before she pulled herself together, staring at him intently. Outwardly, Mike tried to take in her deep stare – how brown her eyes were, how soft her skin was – but inwardly he was squirming, wanting to leave. Because when Eleven stared, it only meant one thing: he was about to say stupid shit.

"Tell me something you're not ready to admit to yourself," Eleven finally asked.

And Mike didn't hesitate in saying, "I'm scared I'm unlovable."

Eleven stepped closer. She raised one hand and touched his cheek, tracing softly his freckles.

Mike tried not to breathe too deeply, afraid that it would break the moment. He let Eleven stroke his face as much as she wanted, while he studied her facial expression carefully, trying to find out what she was feeling.

In the end, Eleven's lips upturned into a forced smile. A sad smile.

"Don't be afraid of that, Mickey. I'm pretty sure there's someone who loves you."

Notes for the Chapter:

Kudos and Comments mean the world, you guys know it.

Love, Dee.

Author's Note:

Yes, this is going to be a slow burn, guys. I'm sorry.

Kudos & Comments will make my day.